

# THROUGH PERSIA IN A MOTOR CAR



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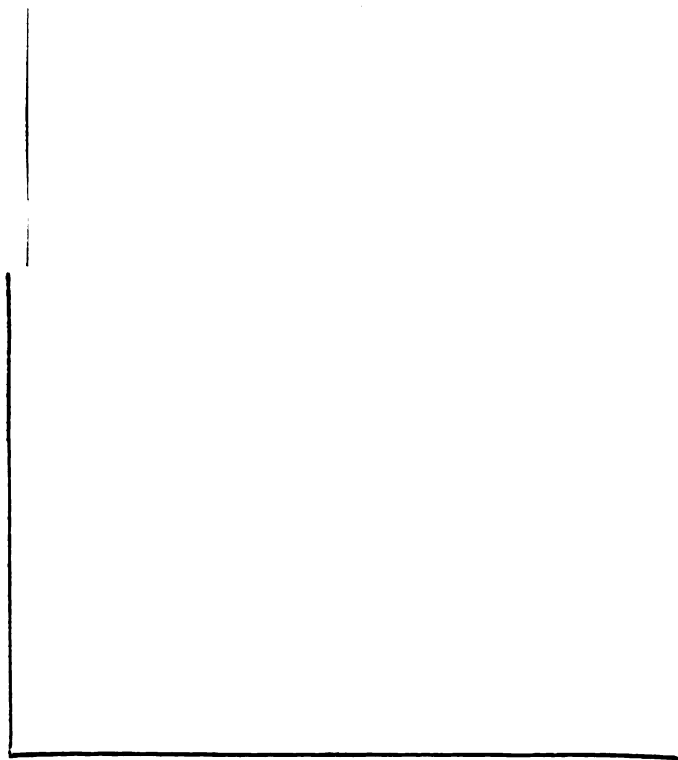
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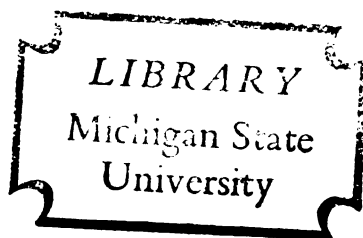
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**THROUGH PERSIA IN A MOTOR-CAR  
BY RUSSIA AND THE CAUCASUS**









ON THE DELIJAN PASS

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THROUGH PERIA

BY

A. H. TOL-CAR

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1905



# THROUGH PERSIA IN A MOTOR-CAR

BY RUSSIA AND THE CAUCASUS

BY  
CLAUDE ANET

*Schepfer, J.*

TRANSLATED BY  
M. BERESFORD RYLEY

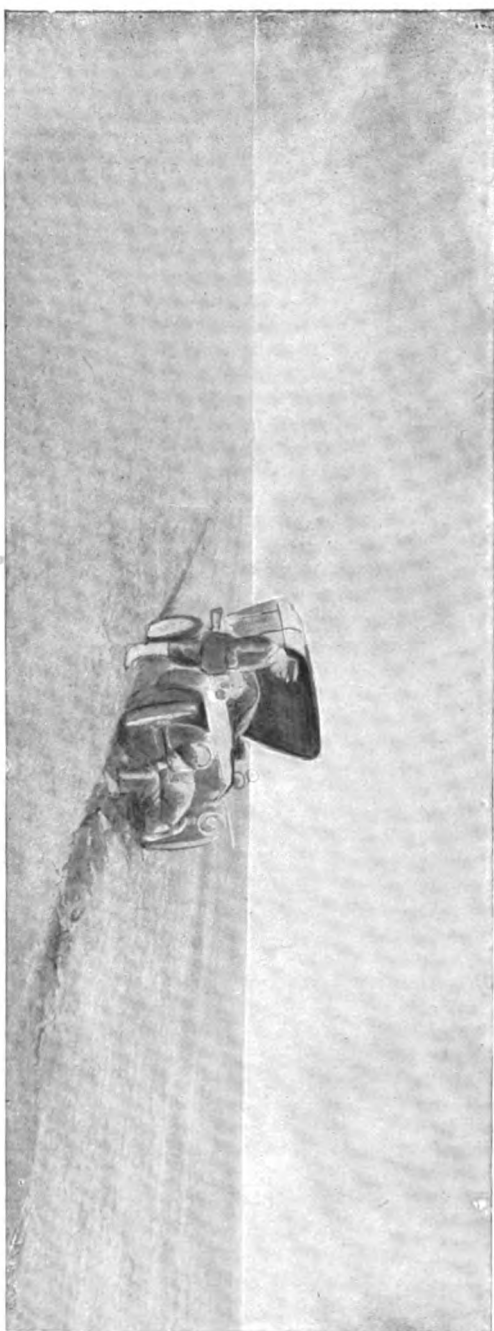
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THE FIRST STAGE. OUR CAR EMBEDDED IN THE MUD OF BESSARABIA

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MEETING A CARAVAN ON A ROAD OF THE CAUCASUS

Page 60

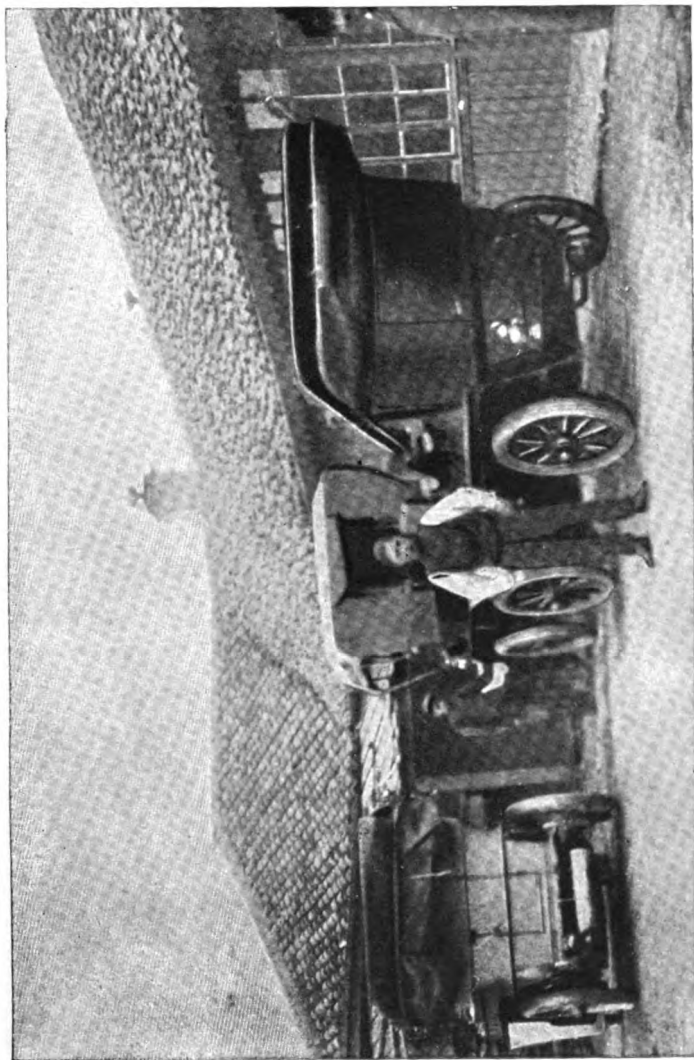


OUR THREE CARS ON THE TRAIN

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OUR FIRST STOP IN BESSARABIA. THE CARS IN THE YARD OF THE INN

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## PREFACE

**T**HERE is no excitement like that of travelling.

To come continually upon one new scene after another, to pass through towns once prosperous but now in ruins, to find solitude and a desert where in ages long gone by a powerful people lived and developed, to go always on and on, to remain nowhere, but to be as one who passes equally among the living and the dead, and who receives the loveliness of a country only to lose it instantly—can there be a fiercer joy, or a deeper, more poignant painfulness than this ?

Personally I am one of those keenly alive to the value of all fleeting sensations. It is always at the moment when a thing is about to be taken from me that I love it most. It is for this reason, probably, that I have a passion for travelling. Only the journey once over, how is one to convey to those sitting comfortably at home its exquisite thrill and intoxication ? How is one, for instance, to explain the joy of our expedition to the heart of Persia, where we went, as it were, gathering roses in the garden of Ispahan ? For our method of travelling

v

## Preface

alone was the least easy conceivable. Instead of going to Baku by train, our one idea was to do as much of the journey as possible by motor-car. In this fashion we traversed Bessarabia, a country which will still for many years be unknown ground to motorists. By this means also we visited the Caucasus and the Crimea, where snow and rain more than anything else obstructed us. Then, after a few excursions round Batum and Koutaïs, we went by train, taking the cars with us, to Baku. In Persia, while one of us vainly tried to motor over the impassable mountains that in the region of Tabriz guard the great plateau of Iran, all the rest of us reached by motor the second sacred town of the Shah's dominions—Kum—where, under the golden cupola of a mosque, sleeps Saint Fatmeh, sister of Imam Reza. At Kum petrol failed us, and we were obliged to front the miseries of crossing the desert in a native diligence before we could hope to attain the paradise of Ispahan.

There, after a six weeks' journey, we passed one unforgettable week, the world and Paris almost falling out of remembrance—"less through the great distance traversed, than the many great rivers flowing in between and the intervention of wide deserts and high mountains."

## Preface

Our party consisted of seven, five men and two ladies, the latter of whom, by their gaiety, good humour, tireless enthusiasm and courage, might almost be said to have taken us instead of we them. Accustomed to a life of extreme luxury and comfort, these two bore with the utmost cheerfulness sleepless nights, insufficient food, dirty lodgings, the cold of dawn, the icy winds of the mountains, and a desert heat so overwhelming that we became torpid and yearned for death, beneath its scorching, blazing intensity. But as their reward they got to Ispahan, and in addition every one of us returned home safely from our journey.

. . . . .

As regards the query whether the journey was worth while, I was asked that question on my return to Paris. My answer was as follows: "Mr. John Robinson, of Birmingham, having made a fortune, decided to retire from business. Then, being bored, he decided to travel. But the only thing that interested him was the occupation of his lifetime. In every foreign town his one desire was to go over the iron and steel works and compare them with his own. Finally he got to Persia, and after many hardships, to Ispahan. He immediately went through the bazaars, but the only comment afterwards entered into his notebook was: 'The iron and steel market not worth looking at.'"

## Preface

The moral of this story is too obvious to need telling.

. . . . .

But what, one asks, first put into the heads of seven reasonable persons the idea of going by automobile to Ispahan? The longing to motor on some other road than the one from Toulon to Nice first occurred to my friend Prince Emmanuel Bibesco, and fired him with a desire to run through the Crimea. He did this primarily without leaving home, by perusing Baedeker and studying maps. From his Baedeker he learnt that there was a steamboat service from Sebastopol to Batum, in the Caucasus. This he mentioned to me on the 1st of January, 1905.

No great knowledge of geography was needed in order to know that Russia had built excellent roads through the mountainous districts of the Caucasus. Consequently, still in the same lazy fashion, we drove through valleys, climbed mountains, and rested in the towns. And at last we reached—on the map—Baku. Here the Caspian Sea stopped us, and for a few days we lingered in this town of petrol.

Then Emmanuel Bibesco came to see me.

“Do you know where Resht is?” he asked.

“Resht in Persia?”

“Resht in Persia.”



## Preface

"Not far from the Caspian Sea, to the south."

"At the present moment, as you know, we are at Baku."

"I can see the Cossacks patrolling the streets."

"Steamboats go twice a week from Baku to Enzeli, the Resht landing-place."

My heart began to beat quickly.

"And from Resht to Teheran," he continued, "Russia has built an excellent road for motor-cars."

That was all I needed. "When shall we start?" I asked, and in three months we were gone.

. . . . .

Meanwhile, however, the revolution had broken out in Russia. The papers were steeped in horrors. As regards the south, which chiefly concerned us, we learnt that at Odessa (and Odessa was one of our halting-places) a universal strike had taken place. At Sebastopol (and we had to go to Sebastopol) riots had broken out in the arsenals. As for the Caucasus, it was full of brigands in the country places, full of massacres in the towns, and of pillage and assassinations everywhere. Batum, moreover, was in a state of anarchy, the Gori peasants having proclaimed a republic. And to avoid going through the Caucasus on our way to Persia was impossible.

## Preface

Every day fresh troubles filled the daily papers. We no sooner added a town to our itinerary than disorders burst forth in it. Yalta merely waited until we arranged to pass through it before a wholesale pillage was said to have devastated the town. Consequently our friends shook their heads, and, more especially when they knew that there were two ladies in our party, decided that we had gone absolutely mad. But nothing could have stopped us, and by the first days of April we were at our starting-point, Bucharest. Our party consisted of Prince George of Bibesco, a well-known sportsman, and a Bibesco doubly French by being the son of the man who fought twice in the wars of France—once at Mexico, and once in 1870. Secondly, of his young wife, who managed somehow always to have flowers—though how she got them in a desert I do not know—and who, next to flowers, loves poetry, even writing charming verses herself. Thirdly, of her cousin, Madame Michel C. Phérékyde, and her husband, who was an old boy of the French school *Louis-le-Grand*. Fourthly, of Prince Emmanuel Bibesco, the original inciter of the expedition, and who both in Russia and the Caucasus bore the brunt of all responsibilities. Fifthly, of Monsieur Léonida, a Roumanian sportsman, more tenacious, as will be seen, than any bulldog. And lastly, of myself.

We had besides three chauffeurs—Keller, a Swiss ;

## Preface

Eugène, a Frenchman, with an intense dislike of the sea ; and Giorgi, a melancholy Roumanian. All three were more than once bitterly to speculate as to wherein lay the pleasurable element of our extraordinary expedition.

Finally there were the three valiant motor-cars—an open, short-built Mercédès, 40 horse-power, 1904 ; a 20 horse-power Mercédès ; and a Fiat, 16 horse-power, all of the same build and year.

And now to start once more on the road to unknown countries, and unknown potentialities and adventures.



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## CHAPTER I

### BESSARABIA

FOR three months we had talked of this journey to Persia, and the time to start had come at last. For two days and two nights I had lived in the Orient Express, passing through Munich, Vienna, and Buda Pesth, and now, at nine o'clock one morning, we were all grouped together outside the Hotel du Boulevard at Bucharest. Our equipment was picturesque enough—dust cloaks, mackintoshes, furs, every kind of cap, gloves, leggings, putties. Nothing was more obvious than that we were not about to start for a simple day's adventure.

The sky was clear, the barometer high, and from Bucharest to Giurgevo, a distance of nearly forty miles, we ran along a good Roumanian road—equivalent to a poor road in France. At Giurgevo we had the gayest of lunches. Some local tailors and shoemakers left their shops to come and play for us, and after lunch we danced in the great hall of the Club. We wondered lightly as we did so whether we should also dance at Teheran. But at the moment the great thing was to strike the Danube,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

a few miles away from the town. Here on the quay we found our luggage, and flung ourselves impetuously upon trunks, handbags, etc.

There is nobody I admire more than the traveller who goes to distant countries and unfrequented places, and in his account of the journey never once refers to the subject of luggage. Travellers of this nature seem to me strangely incorporeal, being insensible to cold, rain, thirst, or want of nourishment. I wish to state at once that we were not these kind of travellers. We needed changes of linen, clothes—in fact, a somewhat extensive outfit. Nothing besides on the whole journey became a more constant and daily anxiety than the business of collecting what was necessary for the next stage of our expedition. Every day trunks had to be packed and unpacked, rugs unstrapped and strapped up again, regardless of fatigue.

In addition to the chauffeurs there were seven of us, and though our original agreement was that we should each have two handbags only, we all secretly added an immense number of small packages, insignificant enough in themselves, but which we spent a large part of our time in counting. The mere gathering together of these various parcels would have consumed an energy less inexhaustible than ours. The photographic apparatus alone constituted a formidable collection. There were three kodaks with Goertz or Zeiss lenses, a small ordinary camera for scenery, and another that was literally

## Bessarabia

colossal. It filled by itself the whole well of the motor-car, and its angles being somewhat sharp, at every stone our shins suffered. Occasionally during a halt it was useful as a table or a footstool, but that, I may mention, was the greatest use it ever became to us. For nothing would induce it to photograph the scenery we took it for. In addition we had two quite unnecessary guns, which occupied their space and ours, as well as a perfectly endless confusion of furs, cloaks, caps, waterproofs, and handbags. All these, along with ten people, had to be packed in three motor-cars. The result naturally was unutterable disorder, delays, and an endless hunting after one's own belongings.

Added to all this we had other trunks which we dispatched by train, by boat, and by parcel post to our various destinations. This independent luggage enjoyed a pleasant journey on its own account, rarely consenting to meet us at the place appointed. We came upon it only at unexpected moments, and consequently always with the same astonishment and pleasure. At Giurgevo, however, all our belongings were intact, that is, with the exception only of a hat-box, which had already cleverly managed to elude us.

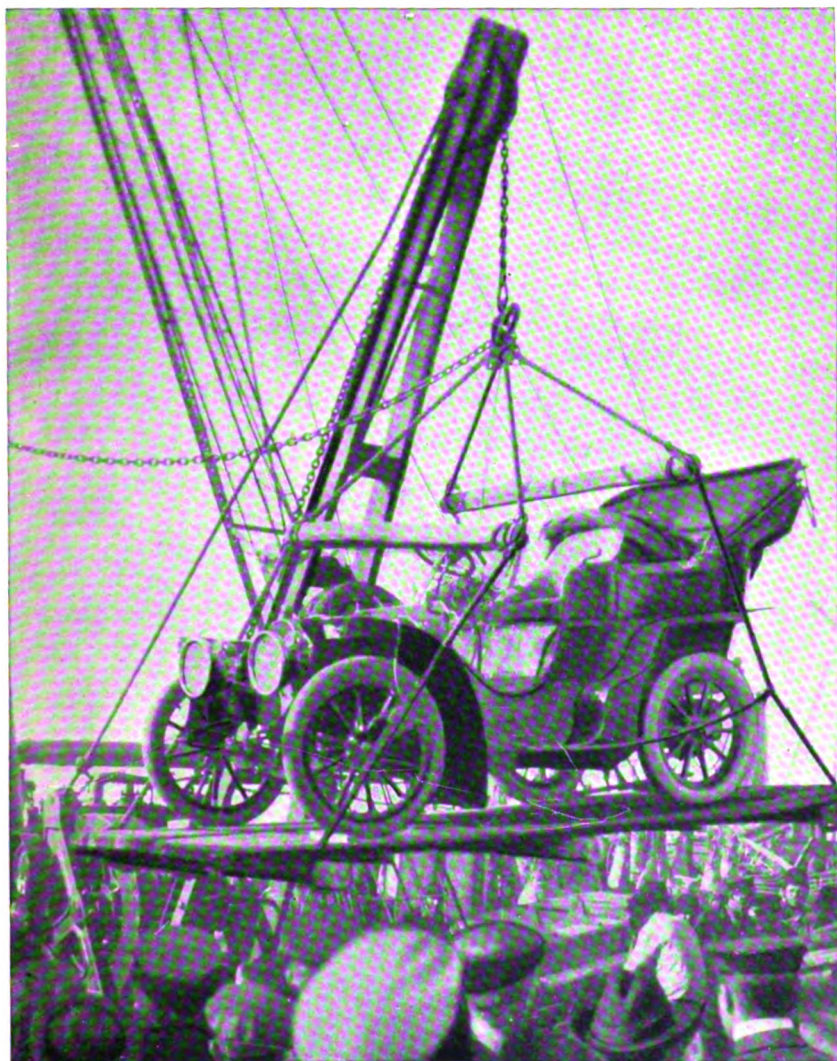
. . . . .

From Giurgevo we went by boat to Galatz, the last port of Roumania, where we took a Russian vessel to Odessa. After having had the greatest

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

difficulty in hoisting the motor-cars on board, owing to the absence of sufficiently strong cranes, we left Galatz. An hour later we arrived at Reni, the Russian frontier. But our letters of introduction were addressed to the authorities at Ismailia, where we intended to land, and not for Reni. Consequently there was considerable difficulty in getting the cars through the customs. It took two hours—Emmanuel Bibesco acting as interpreter—before they could be persuaded to let us through, and even then the boat made no attempt to leave its moorings. Presently we saw some official-looking persons coming down the hill, and learnt that the boat was waiting for the Governor of Bessarabia. We asked ourselves if we were the object of his visit, having already a strong prejudice against Russian official personages. An escort of magnificently uniformed officers came with His Excellency. Arrived on board, he went at once to the cars, and a long conversation followed with the captain. We felt that we were being refused a passage, and that we should be launched into unending custom-house difficulties. But at last he went away again, and we learnt that this delightful person had merely conveyed orders that every facility was to be given to our journey whilst we remained within his government.

In fact, who is it, I wonder, who has spoken so harshly of Russian police and custom-house officials? Let him come to me, for at Ismailia again



GETTING OUR MOTOR-CARS ON BOARD

Facing page 4





## Bessarabia

both bowed to the ground in our honour ; not a single one of our twenty-eight handbags and our six big trunks was opened, whilst the inspector himself carried through the guns, which we were bringing in in spite of the express orders of the administration ; all this being effected by a personal letter from the powerful Minister of the Interior, Bouliguine.

Here at Ismaïlia several hundred people gathered to watch the disembarking of our cars. The smell emanating from this crowd nearly asphyxiated us. Nevertheless for an hour we were obliged to put up with it, whilst one half of our luggage was being dispatched to Odessa, and the other was being packed into the motor-cars.

Man is surely the dirtiest animal in creation ; he is even the dirtiest thing on the surface of the globe, for the rain at least washes the stones on the roadway, whilst when it rains the Bessarabian peasant merely seeks some shelter. All use of water, moreover, for cleansing purposes is ignored by him.

But at last we were ready to start, the motors commenced their throbbing, the crowd hemming us in sprang back terrified, lifted their arms to heaven, proclaimed a miracle, and we were gone. The order of our going was as follows : first the great 40 h.p. Mercédès, as skirmisher, for it was already evening ; then Léonida's 20 h.p. Mercédès ; and lastly the 16 h.p. Fiat, carrying the chauffeurs and the luggage. This was to make sure, in case of accidents, that

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

the chauffeurs would come to our assistance. We were travelling along a Russian road. The ground was hard, stony, with unexpected lumps, until suddenly, to my great surprise, about six miles from Ismailia the road abruptly stopped altogether. The rest were less astonished than I was, and without a moment's hesitation turned the cars into some fields, across which ran well-defined tracks. Here the ground was softer, and progress necessarily slow. In a rainy season these tracks would have been impassable. Thus gently we travelled across Bessarabia. The soil was black; peasants were working in the fields, while sharply outlined against the horizon were yokes of oxen, dimly visible in the last rays of the setting sun. Presently we were reduced to finding our way along the cart-ruts solely by our powerful head-lamps, which threw great streams of light across the deserted country. At last we came upon a small group of poor and scattered houses. It was the little village of Bolgrade, in which we were to pass our first night in Russia.

Here all the dogs of the place barked about the wheels of our motor-cars. We reached the inn and turned into the inner courtyard, where the peasants usually leave their carts whilst they dispatch their business. We were expected, and the *Gorodovoi's*, or policemen, were placed at the entrance to the court to shut the gates behind us, and so prevent a literal invasion of the crowd. At Bolgrade we

## Bessarabia

were prepared for the worst ; we faced the prospect of every possible inconvenience—dirt, vermin, bad food. It was the black spot in our whole itinerary, and to our great delight we found in a little building at the back of the court four little whitewashed rooms, cleanly tiled, and, what was more extraordinary still, possessing iron bedsteads and sheets. Who would have anticipated rooms worthy of the Touring Club in the heart of Bessarabia ? The walls were even hung with lithographs of the Second Empire, whilst a delightful dinner was served, which we washed down by some delicious Bessarabian wine. The whole party was in excellent spirits, and we did nothing but congratulate ourselves upon having started regardless of the evil prophecies which had been showered upon us before leaving.

. . . . .

The next day, the 13th of April, we rose at seven o'clock for a long day's run. We had nearly 160 miles to cover in order to sleep at Ackermann, a big town at the mouth of the Dniester, as everybody knows, and as I learnt that morning. We were no sooner up than we consulted our aneroid. It was unfortunately somewhat low. Sensible people would have gone by train to Odessa, but we had not left Paris in order to be sensible. It was not raining at that precise moment, and we decided to see the country in our motor-cars. We started at nine o'clock, much later than we ought to have

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

done, owing to the fact that we had not yet learnt how much time it took to fit our twenty-eight small packages into the various motor-cars. For that matter, it made no earthly difference when we had discovered this, for we then continued to start late simply through having grown used to doing so.

From Bolgrade we took a steep incline, and saw Bessarabia, barren and treeless, stretched below us, with only here and there the small rounded hills crested by a mound, in which the old Scythian chiefs were buried, mounted on their favourite chargers, or by some old watch-tower of Trajan's phalanges. The Roman Empire extended as far as here ; two valleys which run from east to west still mark its old boundaries ; beyond were the Sarmatian barbarians. Fields of black earth, without a tree, seen under a grey sky stretched endlessly before us. A great flat landscape seemed to extend to eternity. The earth was like one great wave, which broke at intervals to show in its trough some small poverty-stricken village. A rose-coloured falcon got up close to us, and a flock of bustards moved across a neighbouring field. We saw an eagle perched upon a rock ; he watched the coming of our cars, and then, as we approached, flew heavily away.

We travelled slowly, for the road was execrable, and here perhaps it is as well to explain what I mean by the word road in Bessarabia. A road is a track across fields, according to the configuration of the ground either three hundred or three yards

## Bessarabia

wide. Sometimes one loses it entirely, sometimes we got lost in it ourselves. It is also strewn with stones, holes, and mounds of every sort. Sometimes it is crossed by a slope, sometimes by a ditch. It avoids no obstacles. If there is a ravine at the bottom it rushes insanely straight down to it, and once there rises again as best it can by the help of a series of abrupt terraces. When one has to cross a river or a bridge, the only thing to do is to trust to the make of your motor. There are two things, believe me, one should avoid like the plague in Bessarabia—their works of art and their bridges. When there is no actual road one can somehow manage, but when they have metalled the approach to a bridge matters become impassable. Huge holes gape between the road-metal in order to tear off a wheel. Two ditches flank the muddy roadway, rendering the least skidding fatal. In addition, as one may imagine, we lost our way at the end of every field we came to. Consequently we made little progress—from twelve to thirteen miles an hour—while we were as much shaken as if we had been going at the rate of sixty along an ordinary main road in France.

Then came the “skeleton at the feast.” Suddenly it commenced to rain, and to rain in torrents. In a short time the ground was soaked and the smell of sodden earth rose to our nostrils. The 40 h.p. was behaving bravely. Our tyres tore up lumps of black, wet earth, which they flung behind

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

us. At intervals we skidded horribly, and with a less well-built car would long before have had a spill. But at last we dropped into a cart-rut, so deep that the gear-case struck the ground, and though George Bibesco drove sharply to the right, the wheels sank up to the axles, and the car stuck fast in a foot of mud. It was nearly twelve o'clock, the rain was beating down upon us, and how we were to get out of the field in which we were embedded, none of us knew. The other two cars were not in sight, and we began to wonder what had happened to them also. At the end of an hour the rain ceased, and we worked hard to get the car out of the rut into which it had sunk. We alternately raised it with the help of a jack and heaped up the earth under the wheels, until at last, with the aid of the motor which we started working, and our buttressing up the car behind, the *Mercédès* slowly extricated itself from the rut and moved slowly to the open field.

The two women, meanwhile, had got out of the car and had found a clump of violets beaten down by the weight of the rain. There was something exquisite to all of us in finding these sweet and familiar flowers in the wastes in which we were lost. By this time we were ready to start again in search of the rest of the party. Silent, and more anxious than we cared to admit, we crossed the worst bridge we had come to yet, rode through a village that was little more than a lake of mud,

## Bessarabia

and were toiling up a steep incline when we saw Léonida's car coming towards us. But her manner of progress was curious enough, for she was jumping from side to side, tilting, righting herself again, stopping dead ; then, when she came to a steep place, rushing dangerously forward again. At last she reached the village, and we discovered that four of her springs were broken, and that she would have to be repaired before going further. Shortly afterwards, at the rate of about three miles an hour, the chauffeurs joined us. They seemed to have acquired already considerable difficulty in believing that we were travelling in Bessarabia for pleasure only.

Our next immediate necessity was an inn to rest in, and a miserable mud dwelling was pointed out to us. In the front shop they were selling groceries, in a little room beyond we found a table and a bench, and behind that, in another, leading to the courtyard, a stove without a fire. In this, on the bare floor and without undressing, the owners of the house were in the habit of sleeping. Neither the landlord nor his wife took the least notice of us ; he continued plastering a cracked wall, and she shortly disappeared altogether. We were therefore reduced to finding our own wood, of which there was very little, and of cooking ourselves some hard-boiled eggs and a little plain boiled rice. When we asked for something to drink, we found they had nothing but vodka, and so we went without

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

anything. We had brought no provisions with us, imagining that we should easily have reached Tatar-Bounar by lunch-time, and supposing that in any case we could get anything that was necessary in the villages we passed through. The disillusion was tremendous. Even the rice tasted so strangely of mice that we had to give up trying to eat it, and the bread was mouldy. We ended by making our meal off one hard-boiled egg each—certainly it was light diet. Afterwards we explored the village, which bore the name of “The Fairies’ Fountain.” The fountain consisted of a miry marsh at the foot of the valley. The mud was so thick it was impossible to walk about. But some incredibly dirty peasants came instead to gaze at us. After some discussion among themselves the boldest of them engaged in conversation with Bibesco. Pointing to the big Mercédès he asked, “Did it cost much money?”

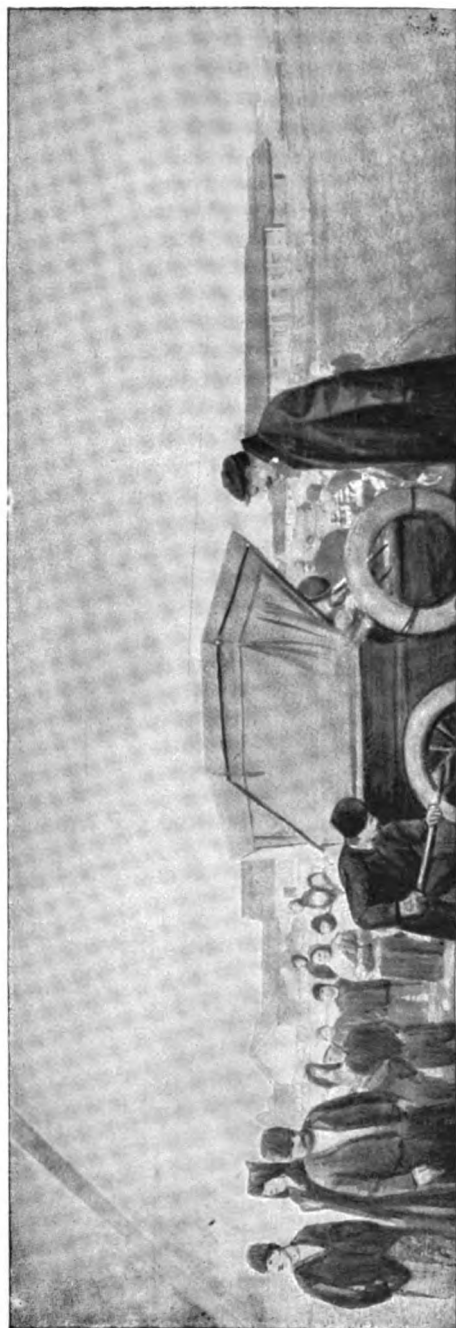
“More than ten thousand roubles,” answered Bibesco.

This for a moment stupefied him; then he inquired, “Will it carry wheat?”

After this he returned to his companions, who continued to stare at us in a motionless group. I take it we shall be long remembered at the Fairies’ Fountain.

Meanwhile we were holding our first council of war. As far as we could make out we were twenty-





AT THE FAIRIES' FOUNTAIN. A PEASANT TAKING THE MUD OFF OUR WHEELS WITH A SPADE

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## Bessarabia

five miles from Tatar-Bounar, a little town, according to Bibesco's guide-book, of five thousand inhabitants. But at Tatar-Bounar there was no railway. To get there, sleep the night, and reach Ackermann on the following day, fine weather was an absolute necessity. As two hours of rain had already rendered the ground so sodden as to be actually dangerous, it therefore became a question whether it would not be wiser to return to Bolgrade and take the train from there to Odessa.

But to be beaten, practically on the first day of our expedition, by the first difficulty that confronted us, was a thing to be ashamed of. Besides, the clouds were lifting, and the barometer showed a tendency to rise. During the three hours since it had cleared up, the earth must surely have had time to dry a little, and we decided consequently to start for Tatar-Bounar. Léonida and his chauffeur we left behind, making new springs at the blacksmith's, and at about five o'clock we started once more through sodden fields, steep ravines, and over perilous bridges to our destination. Through taking a wrong turning we presently added twelve miles to the twenty-five already before us. Night came, we lit our head-lamps, and after two hours' wanderings across deserted fields, broken up by treacherous streams, we finally arrived at the outskirts of the town we had originally hoped to reach by midday. When we did at last get there it was ten o'clock at night, and we were all haggard with hunger.

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Moreover, once arrived we were nearly drowned in the streets, which proved to be little better than a huge quagmire. The inhabitants, roused from slumber, came out and surrounded us, whilst the *Ouradnik*, or head of police, was uncertain whether to look upon us as suspects or lunatics. Vainly we clamoured for the hotel our weary bodies so sorely needed. There was none, and now I come to think of it, why should there be an hotel at Tatar-Bounar ? From the day this detestable town was originally built, I am certain we were the first Europeans who ever entered it, and if my advice is only taken, nobody else will ever follow in our footsteps.

In the end we were thrust almost by force into an appalling inn. We crossed its courtyard at the risk of our lives, so deep were the holes and so thick the mud. Some greasy women received us, and a hideous girl showed us all they had to offer—one dirty room and three beds, pressed one against another. The smell that issued from the room was awful, and to think of sleeping in it was out of the question. We sighed after the delightful inn at Bolgrade. Then Bibesco, seeing the general discouragement, made a persuasive proposal. Less than forty miles, he argued, stood between us and Ackermann, where a sumptuous hotel, clean beds, hot baths, and delicious meals awaited us. Why not rest here an hour, have some supper, since we had neither lunched nor dined, and at eleven o'clock start off again, to reach that blessed haven, Acker-

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mann, by one o'clock in the morning? I tried to insinuate some reasonable objections, bringing forward the fact that we should be travelling in an unknown and difficult country, that it would be dark, and that it would probably rain. But I was not insistent. Tatar-Bounar was too great a disillusion. The two ladies, moreover, declared themselves ready to start at any moment, and after a meagre supper upon the only food obtainable—a box of stale sardines and some shrivelled-up sausages—we were once more ready to start.

The new arrangement was that we should not lose sight of each other, and that the 40 h.p. should lead the way. I was in the chauffeurs' car; Léonida had not yet joined us. The night was pitch-dark, the wind howled furiously, and at every moment we had to stop to find the road again, a business which soon became almost impossible. Presently we in the engineers' car lost sight of the Mercédès. To render matters worse our only lamp began to grow dim, making us like blind men staggering along a road strewn with obstacles. And suddenly an embankment sprang up in front of us. The engineer drove sharply to one side, but only to come upon a steep incline, which pitched us in three bounds to the bottom of a ravine. Through nothing short of a miracle we alighted in the car instead of under, while the car itself landed on its four wheels, though up to its axles in mud. Vainly we tried to drag it out; there was nothing left to

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do but to wait for the return of the 40 h.p. Frozen with cold, we listened to the owls hooting lugubriously around us. However, at the end of twenty minutes, though it seemed to us an hour, the Mercedes came back to our assistance, and with the help of stout ropes we were finally extricated from our uncomfortable position.

Once more we started. A quarter of an hour later our lamp went out altogether, and we lost twenty minutes seeing to it. At the end of our efforts it merely glimmered. Clearly we were destined to destruction, for the road was dangerous, unknown, and treacherous. Shortly afterwards came another delay ; this time the petrol was exhausted, and it became necessary to unload the car to get at it, no small matter considering our method of packing. All this time an icy and cutting north wind lashed our faces, and we asked ourselves sadly where was Ackermann, with its eighty thousand inhabitants, its hotels, and the baths we hankered for. It was now three o'clock in the morning, and we were still in the heart of a deserted landscape. Even the two courageous ladies had ceased to laugh at this point.

Once more we started for Ackermann. Our light was little better than that of an oil lamp, hardly lighting the road for more than twenty yards in front of us. Grown reckless, we nevertheless increased our speed, though the pace seemed insanity, as we had to feel our way by the ruts in the track,

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and we were shaken the whole time like fruit trees in a tempest. This, however, was hardly to be wondered at, as one moment we skidded violently and the next were pulled up with a jerk. For a few seconds we raced down a mountain side, then flew across holes and over lumps of broken earth three feet high. All of us were stupid with fatigue, and the chauffeur on the footboard more than once nearly fell off. Personally I was a prey to hallucinations—the road on each side of me seeming bordered by enormous trees that met darkly over our heads. For a moment I slept, but a sudden movement of the brake woke me with a start.

By this time our lamp had gone out altogether. The *Mercédès* then drove a little to one side behind us, in order to give us her light. We dashed along madly, our faces lashed incessantly with fragments of earth. We had been driving for five hours, and the dawn, dreary and dirty-looking, began to break through the cloudy sky. Still we fronted nothing but the wastes. Ackermann! oh, Ackermann! At last we saw a few carts crossing the fields. Half an hour later we came upon houses, a miserable suburb, and some labourers going to work. We had reached the town at last. But where was the hotel? Where was the palace promised to us? There was no hotel, only a dirty inn, where they gave us a room without any ventilation whatsoever, opening out upon an enclosed gallery. Twenty-two hours back we had left Bolgrade, and since then we had practically

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neither eaten nor slept. But we had come to seek adventures, and having found them were nothing less than enchanted.

After barely two hours of broken sleep we were called at ten o'clock in the morning to welcome Léonida, who had driven all night without a rest. He had, however, fallen in the same ravine as we had, but, having had no 40 h.p. to haul him out, had been obliged to secure the assistance of some oxen. Nevertheless he was panting to start off again, and consequently, after visiting the Turkish fortress, now in ruins, and having some luncheon, we took the boat across the Dniester to Ovidiopol, in order to go from Ovidiopol to Odessa. I need not describe the road between these two towns. It is sufficient to say that the distance between them is twenty miles, and that we took over four hours to cover it. We were, however, travelling by night, and had only the compass to guide us. At the same time I beg to state that nobody who has not travelled in Kherson has any real conception what rain is. Geographers mention that the average rainfall a year at Odessa is sixteen inches. In that case we received the whole of it in one brief two hours. A watch which I carried in the inside pocket of my inner coat, underneath a waterproof, and in a motor-car with the hood up, was found on our arrival choked with mud and water. As for the wild dance Léonida's Mercédès, with its non-skidding tyres, performed in front of me during the whole of these



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two hours, the thing beggars description. Even now I dislike recalling it at bedtime, for fear of having nightmare.

Nevertheless, that evening, stretched comfortably in easy chairs at the Hotel de Londres at Odessa, we looked at one another with reciprocal appreciation, and though but that moment escaped from the dangers of Bessarabia, commenced already making arrangements for our new venture in the Crimea. As a matter of fact the last forty-eight hours had already woven a subtle bond between us. We began to realize the intrepid traveller potential in all of us. Enthusiasm, and just that necessary touch of madness, was already alive in the whole party. Truly it was to be a splendid experience.

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We decided to start for Sebastopol on Saturday, the 15th, but in the end, through sheer weariness, waited for the boat starting two days later. Meanwhile we quietly explored Odessa, which is built in blocks, after the American fashion. A magnificent sea-front, over thirty yards wide, dominates the harbour. Apparently the Duc de Richelieu was governor of the city at the beginning of the last century. To him is due the great stairway which leads from the sea-front to the harbour. As a town Odessa is rich. It has developed quickly, and consists at present of half a million inhabitants, of which a third are Jews. Why, instead of perse-

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cuting and massacring them the Tsar does not encourage all the Jews of the world to come and settle in Russia, and civilize it by their commercial industry, passes my imagination.

In Odessa they seem to possess representatives of every nationality under the sun. An old Jew, of whom I inquired the way in Russian, answered me—

“Si parla italiano?”

“Un poco.”

And there we were launched upon a language which, the gods be thanked, was never spoken by Dante. A little further on, at a watchmaker's, where I bought a watch to replace the one just soaked with water, I came upon a fusty German. At the chemist's they spoke French, and in the bazaar English. From every one we could we made inquiries concerning the strikes and the general unrest, so much talked of in Russia. The Governor assured us that the town was quiet. It is true they had tried to assassinate him a few weeks previously, but since they had not succeeded all was for the best at Odessa. It was, however, quite a different story as regards the Caucasus, for which we were bound. The trains no longer ran except in the daytime, and took thirty hours for a journey usually occupying ten. The rails, moreover, were frequently taken up by strikers, while disaffected peasants committed constant acts of brigandage without any effective interference from the police.

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This was enough for us. We at once decided that nothing on earth should alter our arrangements, and that at any cost we should pursue our way through the Caucasus. On Monday, therefore, the 17th of April, at four o'clock in the afternoon, with all our trunks, boxes, baggages, and three motor-cars, we left Odessa and started by boat for Sebastopol.

## CHAPTER II

### THE CRIMEA

WHEN towards seven in the morning of the 18th of April we went on deck, the coast of the Crimea rose indistinctly through the mist. But in a short time first the mountains and then all the pale blue landscape emerged into sight, and at the end of a bay we saw Sebastopol.

Did the torpedo-destroyers mistake the "Grande Duchesse Zenie" for a Japanese vessel? One, three, five left the harbour and came rapidly towards us. Then two cruisers began to move seawards. We could not but feel grateful to the Admiralty for offering us gratuitously such an interesting sight.

The roads of Sebastopol are very fine. As has been shown by experience, a fleet can anchor in them with perfect safety. When we entered the harbour it was full of bustle, new boats being in the process of construction, while in dry dock others were under repair. Bolts were being riveted with a great noise of hammers to an accompaniment of whistling, siren-shrieks, and a sudden letting off of steam, the latter rising in the fresh morning air like clouds scattered by the wind. A noisy and

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warlike activity characterized the scene. But we only intended stopping there for a few hours, the time merely that would be necessary to get ready to start by motor-car for the little Tartar town of Batchi-Seraï.

Sebastopol itself struck us as without interest. It is true it contained a museum rich in relics of the war of 1854-5, but the latter was too remote to interest us, and our souls were not attuned to tales of war. Certainly we made inquiries as to the present political state of affairs, but then they immediately concerned us. By way of answer I was shown a French half-penny paper stating that Sebastopol was in flames.

"Still," I persisted, "they say Yalta really has been practically sacked."

"Mere exaggeration," replied my informant, who, as it happened, had need of a Crimea overrun with tourists for his livelihood. I had been questioning the proprietor of a restaurant.

But our intention was to lunch early and start immediately afterwards for Batchi-Seraï, thirty miles off, and from there to go through the Balbek Valley, and over the mountains which look down on Yalta, and so reach the Russian Nice, with its well-known baths—a distance of some ninety-five miles. We were told the roads were good, so that it only remained a question of weather.

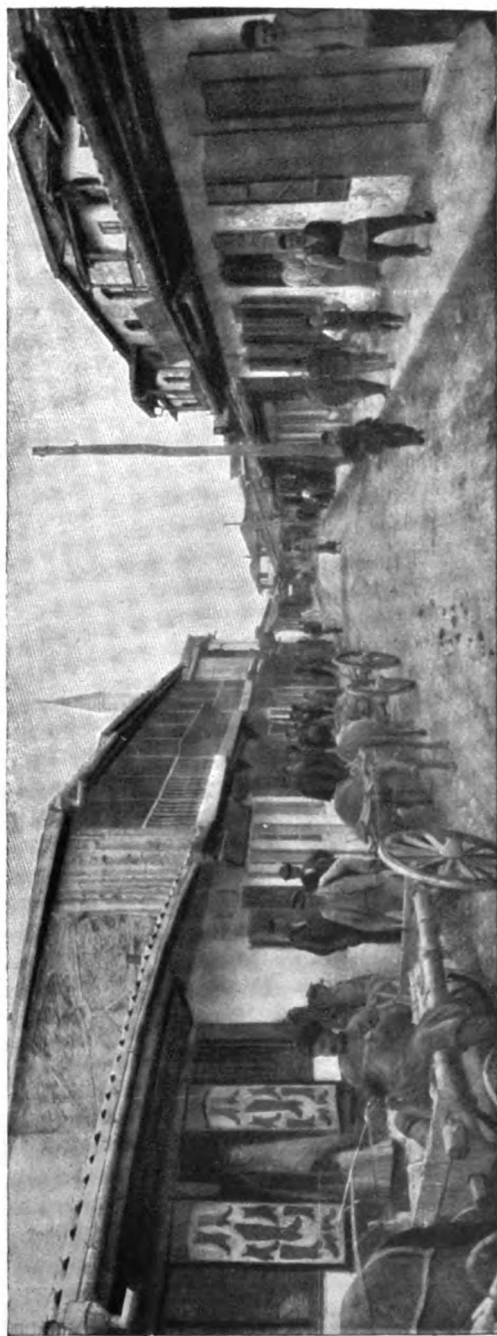
We left Sebastopol at one o'clock in the midst of a chorus of curses from a crowd of Tartar coachmen, who had collected in front of the hotel. The sur-

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rounding scenery—at least by name—was known to us, and we crossed the heights of Inkermann, climbed the Malakoff hill, and tore down the Balbek valley without difficulty. For once we had not been deceived ; the roads on the whole were good, though every now and then we came upon a torrent bed which shook us a good deal. Once I saw my bag suddenly shoot out from the chauffeurs' car, and after having described a graceful parabola in the air fall heavily upon the road. Personally we should have done the same, had we not clung desperately to the sides of the motor.

The country was charming—a late and tremulous spring clothing the fields in green and loading the almond trees with blossom. Our delight in exploring by motor a new country was intense. Finally we reached Batchi-Seraï, a Tartar town of fifteen thousand inhabitants, at the bottom of a wild and narrow valley. It consists of one long, picturesque street, with its entrance guarded by a group of barracks, in which a Russian battalion is quartered.

In the old palace, the home of the Tartar khans, the original masters of the country, we were shown a room where the great Catherine had slept. The buildings, Oriental in style, though of the decadent period, were unattractive ; but the gardens which enclosed them were altogether fascinating, whilst the cemetery, full of the tombs of former khans, was extraordinarily lovely. In the open sarcophagi, some dating back to the fifteenth and sixteenth



THE MAIN AND ONLY STREET OF BATCHI-SERAI

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centuries, great clusters of violets and pink wall-flowers and huge masses of peach blossom were growing, whilst from the heart, as it were, of all this exquisiteness, the delicate minaret of a mosque rose to the pale blue sky.

An hour later we were on the road again. Before reaching Yalta we had a run of over sixty miles before us, which included the negotiation of a mountain and a pass, 4,500 feet above the sea-level.

In the lower populous valleys we passed little houses surrounded by gardens, farms, and fields, in which Tartars were working; but later on not a village, not a house, was to be seen. We passed into a forest and into absolute solitude. The road began to climb with a sharp gradient up the side of a mountain. I saw a hundred yards above me the 40 h.p. taking the sharpest curves without effort, while below me toiled the 16 h.p. with all our baggage. There was a torrent channel to every zigzag, and every zigzag was at least one hundred yards in length. It was, besides, growing dark, and we were going uphill all the time. Presently we came to some snow lying under the trees, but we got safely out of the forest, and were nearly at the top of the pass, when suddenly, at a turning in the road, we were faced by a wall of snow three feet in height.

The Mercédès dashed to the assault, but the snow was soon piled up in an insuperable barrier before the radiator. What was to be done? There

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was not half a mile of snow before us, and we were only twelve miles from Yalta. Behind was the terrible zigzagging road by which we had come up, but which we should have to go down, not only in the dark, but in a starving condition. Yet in spite of this, there was no choice, and for two hours we dashed down four thousand feet, skirting precipices, getting thrown into the air at every channel, and at every hundred yards brought to a standstill by the road seeming almost to turn upon itself.

At last we reached the plain. The wind had freshened to a gale, and heavy clouds swept across the sky, grown, it seemed to us, pitch black. By eleven we were on the rocky hill of Malakoff. Here a tyre burst, and whilst it was being repaired we got out and, wrapped up in rugs and shawls, sat huddled together on the ground, half dead with hunger and exhaustion. And as we sat on the bare earth of Malakoff, among rocks and stray patches of grass, the howling wind carried sad memories of the past into our brains. Others had lain there more weary than we—so weary, indeed, that to a whistling of bullets as continuous as the wind we heard they let their souls slip away from their worn-out bodies.

During our walks about the streets of Sebastopol, after our return from this expedition, we tried to take a lesson in Russian by reading the names above the shops. Oh, why have Russians so com-

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plicated an alphabet ? To make it more difficult still, they take some of the letters of our alphabet only to give them a different significance. Their M is our T, their P our R, and their printed letters are different from their written ones, and their capitals from their smaller type. For a beginner to try and decipher a written address is quite impossible. Personally I absolutely refused to recognize my own name in Russian characters. One other discovery that I made after an eight days' stay in Russia is that very few Russians can speak French, and that strangers have very false ideas upon this subject. Those that speak French do not live in their own country ; they are to be found in France and in the cosmopolitan watering places, where, though agreeable to meet, they are in no sense useful. In Russia not a driver, workman, peasant, policeman, or shepherd knows even the rudiments of the French language. To travel, therefore, in Russia, as we were doing in a motor-car, it is absolutely essential to understand, to speak, and to read Russian. Luckily we had Bibesco as interpreter, while the rest of us, in our daily difficulties, did the best we could with pantomimic efforts. The only thing we all learnt to say was *Stakan Tchai*, which acted like magic in even the loneliest of villages, being invariably followed by the immediate appearance of an excellent cup of tea.

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Finally one afternoon we started for Yalta, a distance of fifty miles from Sebastopol. Our first halt was at the monastery of St. George, to reach which one had to leave the high road and go about nine miles across the fields. The peasant who was directing us lost his way and landed us on the top of an embankment, with a ditch on the far side no motor-car could possibly have taken. Determined not to be frustrated, we were obliged to turn ourselves temporarily into road-makers, even the two ladies helping to carry great stones for the purpose.

If at Paris I had known some faint dubiety as to the wisdom of taking two young and delicately-nurtured ladies on so adventurous an expedition, I had by this time completely lost it. To have seen their unquenchable gaiety and good humour during our awful night in Bessarabia would have been sufficient in itself. But throughout our journey it was they who heartened us, besides preventing the small outbursts of irritation natural to harassed male travellers. In future I shall always strenuously advocate the inclusion of some charming women on similar expeditions—though, of course, careful selection is necessary.

The monastery of St. George is built upon a rock nine hundred feet above the bluest of inland seas. Truly the long-haired monks who retreat there have every reason sincerely to thank God for a life of leisure set in one of the loveliest spots of His creation.

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We continued our way from there along a good road, set in an undulating country, with fertile fields cut up by little streams, and by hills with chalk-faced cuttings. At five o'clock we reached Balaclava, and entered what seemed to be a little town in miniature. There were tiny green gardens, tiny houses, and low, indented hills, with the ruins of an old Genoese tower on the left. These hills surround, one would think, a lake, upon which sleep yachts and other boats, but actually, a few yards away from us, flush with the water, we saw a black muzzle, which turned out to be the bow of a torpedo-boat, brought there, we fancied at great cost, purely for our edification. We went to the end of the quay and then discovered a narrow entrance which, between two walls of rock, led into the sea beyond. We subsequently left Balaclava for the main road, delighted with the little blue and green town, enfolded between its chalky downs, which had seemed to us like some unexpected plaything come upon in the byways of our journey.

At sunset, comfortably ensconced in the luxurious seats of our motors, we were running under a cloudless sky through a stretch of magnificent scenery. It was as if for the time being the world belonged to us. Our two ladies alternately recited snatches of poetry, making Ronsard, Chénier, Vigny, and Verlaine seem, as it were, to be with us in this distant country, while our voices brought something old and familiar into the strangeness of the scenery through which we were passing.

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Gradually the rocks grew rosy under the setting sun, and the road abruptly zigzagged upwards. At the top a large stone archway bridged the road—we had reached the celebrated entrance to Baïdar. Once past the gateway the earth seemed suddenly to fall beneath our feet. To the right and left rose a circle of jagged hills, while five thousand feet below us lay the murmuring sea, and midway between us and it rose a church with five golden cupolas. At the base of some cyclopean rocks a cluster of blossoming fruit trees flung their note of white into the landscape. From the very heart of rocks, and reaching to the water itself, sprang a rich and flowering vegetation.

An impressive silence surrounded us, and something like awe at the beauty of the scene before us touched our spirits. To the left an enormous dull red moon seemed slowly to issue out of the very sea itself. As it rose in the sky it grew yellow and luminous, flinging across the dark waters a pathway of shining gold. The road we had to go down seen from above was enough to make the strongest head giddy. Twisted as a corkscrew, with abrupt turns, it had almost a gradient of twenty per cent. But having survived Bessarabia we were beyond the reach of terror, while I believe, in addition, that the road is still to be found which would dismay my friend Bibesco. On starting from Bucharest I had confided my life—after all, the most precious possession I have—into his keeping; it

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was therefore his concern for the time being, and I never gave a second thought to it. It was all the same to me whether he was holding the tiller of a sailing-boat or the wheel of a motor-car. Sitting behind him, I have enjoyed some magnificent and, in the eyes of others, extremely dangerous leaps from the solid earth. They never at any time caused me the least anxiety. When the car flung me three yards in the air, I merely said to myself, "What's the odds, when we are sure of coming down again on all four wheels," which also invariably happened, when we would peacefully continue our journey. His two hands on the wheel, and his feet upon the brakes, Bibesco would look steadily in front of him, and almost without stirring I have known him drive for twenty-two hours without a stop. Surely no chauffeur would do as much, which only proves the superiority of the amateur over the professional. Personally I will never for the future travel with another driver.

Meanwhile the night had once more fallen. It seemed, indeed, to be our destiny to be always travelling in the dark. We reached Ackermann at dawn, Sebastopol welcomed us at one o'clock in the morning, and here we were in search of an apparently fugitive Yalta at past ten o'clock at night. But at last, behind a promontory, we perceived a lighthouse, then the electric lights of the port, and after ten versts through fragrant orchards the villas and quay of Yalta. As usual we were starved,

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having had no dinner. But for the first time we were in advance of our time-table, for it was only midnight.

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To be frank, it was less the beauty of Yalta than the knowledge of its recent dramatic troubles which had originally drawn us to the place. For since we had been in Russia, which according to foreign telegrams was altogether given over to riots and massacres, we had not even seen the smallest trace of disorder. But at Yalta at last we came upon genuine signs of rioting. Here a window was broken, there a house burnt ; still further, we saw a temporarily erected shop-front. For ourselves we were all armed to the teeth—that is, we each carried a revolver. Even the ladies had little daggers stuck into their waist-belts. Emmanuel Bibesco alone carried nothing more alarming than a nail file. With souls afire we asked for an account of the recent disturbances. For forty-eight hours Yalta had been in the hands of the rioters. One lady informed us that hers had been one of the houses burnt to the ground. She seemed to find the incident so amusing that even to recall it sent her into fits of laughter. “ They rescued our piano by lowering it out of the window with thick ropes. It lurched ridiculously. You’ve no idea how grotesque——” And once more she could not speak for laughter. Obviously it must have been funny,



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but what to me was the funniest part of the story was the fact that she thought it so comic.

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But now Yalta was once more tranquil; nothing, indeed, could be more undisturbed than the people's expressions. Lacking others, we therefore started making troubles of our own. Yalta, most luxurious of towns, seems to be in the hands of a noisy horde of Tartar Jehus. From two to three hundred have their stands upon the quay, and at the noise of our motor-cars the horses, badly broken in and badly harnessed, took fright, reared, pranced, and bolted in all directions. The drivers cursed us loudly, but as their abuse was largely incomprehensible and seemed besides not addressed to us at all, but to our parents and ancestors, we bore it placidly. Twenty-four hours later, however, owing to the complaints lodged by them, we received a visit from the governor of Yalta, brother of the celebrated Trepoff of St. Petersburg. His manner was at first slightly intimidating, but we had only to show a certain sealed and signed paper to be assured of the haughty gentleman's undying devotion.

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That same day we learnt that Maxim Gorky was convalescing in the neighbourhood. Having got his address from a chemist I determined to go and see him. The carriage followed the road to Livadia, then entered a sort of park called Tchou-

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kourlar, in which several isolated little villas were placed well back from the dust of the highway and looking out upon the sea below. But the scenery was little park-like, though it was pretty with vines and blossoming fruit trees. The last house on the winding roadway was a one-storied white villa, with an Italian flat roof and terrace. The servant at the door could make nothing of my questions. Suddenly a tall man dressed in black entered the hall. This was Maxim Gorky himself.

Having shown me into a small sitting-room he disappeared. The room in which I was left was simplicity itself ; both walls and ceiling, the latter being extraordinarily high, were merely cleanly whitewashed. Gorky then returned with his wife, to whom I was introduced, and to whom I explained the keen sympathy and admiration which had prompted this visit. Madame Gorky speaks excellent French, with just a touch of timidity, and with the softest and most charming of accents. Her husband understands nothing but Russian ; thanks to her, however, conversation became possible. The instant Gorky learnt that I had come from Paris, and that I knew personally several of the writers whose translated works he so much admired, his face brightened. He wanted at once to express his appreciation of our great literary men, though his preference was all for the realists ; among the dead, for Flaubert, Maupassant, the de Goncourts ; among the living, for Anatole France, Pierre Loti,

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and Octave Mirbeau. It was the latter, indeed, which appealed to him the most. Curiously enough, Tolstoi had already expressed his enthusiasm for the same author. All the passion and pain, all the bitter and tragic satire of the "*Calvaire*" and the "*Journal d'une femme de chambre*" seem to have won the hearts of the two greatest of contemporary Russian writers. While Gorky was speaking I watched him. He was tall, lithe, upright, dressed in a sort of loose tunic of black cloth, with a tight collar at the neck, and worn with high, soft leather boots. The face, with its projecting cheek-bones, was powerful looking, but harassed and lined; his fair hair was brushed off the forehead, while a little sparse red beard covered a strongly-developed chin. The nostrils were large, and the eyes of a dark blue. They were the eyes of a man of action, who had suffered, not those of a mystic. The whole face, in fact, wore the energetic but tired expression of a man who had spent his strength regardless of consequences. When his wife translated for him the sympathy we all felt in France for this stage of his career his tense face softened, and eyes and mouth both broke into a happy, confident smile, expressing a profound goodness and an unquenchable youthfulness of outlook.

Madame Gorky told me how her husband was arrested at the very moment of his arrival at Riga, where she was lying dangerously ill. Without an hour's respite they dragged him to the fortress at

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St. Petersburg. There they searched and undressed him, and for a long time left him destitute of clothes in an icy-cold room, and standing barefooted on a stone floor. It was that, she said, which had given him the cough he was now suffering from.

He made no complaint about the prison treatment, save that they refused to give him the telegrams containing news of his wife's condition. Finally they had granted provisional liberty. His great crime was to have moved heaven and earth to try and prevent the horrible January massacres. All this, however, one knows already. After they had taken place he wrote an account giving their tragic details, also the sketch of an appeal, which remained in the rough. It was neither printed nor signed, nor distributed in manuscript, but, having been seized at the house of one of his friends, it constituted the motive for his trial. This was to take place *in camera*, but the date, when I saw him, was still not settled. We passed naturally from that to Gorky's earlier life. Many untrue stories are current concerning it, both in France and in Russia. It has been said that he was born in the utmost destitution. This is not true. He chose the latter deliberately, which is a very different thing. He was born at Nijni-Novgorod of a family in comfortable circumstances. His grandfather, who was a house decorator, apparently brought him up. The child was not sent to school, but his grandfather, who desired him as his successor, taught him his

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business. Maxim, however, yearned for a more adventurous life than that of a house painter ; he craved to see the world, men, and what men were doing, and he ended by running away. For a time he was cabin-boy on a boat on the Volga, then a baker's assistant. He endured all the strain, the misery and deprivations of the poverty-stricken. He lived among these to whom the sole problem of life is whether they will have day by day enough to subsist upon. He knew in all their tragic reality the inner lives of workmen and of peasants, and even of those outside the pale of respectability—those whom he has called so appropriately “ the ex-men.” Driven partly by the necessity of earning a livelihood, and partly by the imperious desire to see new places and conditions, he has been a vagrant across the immensity of Russia. North and south, east and west, are all familiar to him, from the wooded shores of Finland to the superb and solemn mountains of the Caucasus. But this wandering life, it must be remembered, was deliberately chosen ; he could have been, like his grandfather, a peaceful decorator of houses. Comically enough for the Russian government, he is still what his people intended he should be, and in the official indictment he is described as Maxim Gorky, “ house painter and man of letters.”

It is also said that he is illiterate. This again is an exaggeration. As a young man he felt so strongly the necessity for education that for years he gave

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

up a part of his night's rest in order to read the best Russian and foreign authors. "My husband at this time was so poor," said Madame Gorky, "that he could not afford to buy candles. He therefore used to fill old sardine-boxes with any oil he could find, making a wick of a small piece of wool. It was due to this that he very nearly lost his eyesight."

Gorky commenced to write at the age of twenty-two. He was thirty-six when I saw him, but from his worn appearance it was evident that such a life of suffering had told heavily upon him. He said himself, "At thirty-six in France one is a young man, but in Russia——"

. . . . .

I wondered as we talked what relations existed between Gorky and Tolstoi. In the end I risked the question, and learnt that Tolstoi represented to my host the greatest living writer of Russia. He told me that what the latter had been to him during the hours of his tribulation was beyond all utterance. The more one knew the man the more one loved him ; but Tolstoi as an apostle mixed up with the present struggles in Russia is a different matter. He published after the horrors of January a letter to "The Times" which caused the deepest distress to all his old admirers. Gorky desired to answer it, but such a flood of unworthy abuse was let loose in the Russian papers against the reformer that he,

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Tolstoi's friend in former days, felt that he could not add one more voice to the chorus of accusers. Madame Gorky gave me an excellent sketch of Tolstoi. "He is," she said, "an aristocrat. He was born among those who command, and even to-day he has the attitude of a general. He does not belong to the people and does not understand them. He has no real knowledge of their lives or what they stand in need of. Consequently he has no real right to speak in the name of the people at all. The things he asks for are not those that Russia requires at the moment. My husband, on the other hand, comes from the people, and desires to labour for them in a practical fashion. Tolstoi makes no difference between the political and social state of England and France and that of Russia, his sole aim being that men should voluntarily renounce evil and live according to rules of Christianity. Maxim, on the other hand, desires the gradual growth of self-respect, equal political rights, universal liberty of conscience, self-governing communes, a constitutional government, and education brought within the reach of every one."

I gathered that Gorky was well aware of the immense struggle Russia was facing owing to the ignorance of the masses and the frightful indifference of the upper classes. He realized the gravity of the situation, but instead of feeling discouragement, he hoped that out of the very excess of the evil there must in the end emerge a different and better condition of affairs.

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I told him we should be glad to see him settle in France, but for the moment it was in Russia he desired to concentrate his energies. I saw him shiver at the thought of being kept inactive in this luxurious Yalta. "I don't like the place," he said; "there in the Caucasus where you are going nature is wild and vigorous and beautiful."

On the table I saw several French books, amongst others "*La Maternelle*," by Frapié, of which both were very fond. Madame Gorky apparently kept her husband in touch with all the current literature of France. The only other thing I noticed was the flowers, and they were everywhere—on the tables, in the windows, and in every imaginable place.

I said good-bye, and shall long remember the hearty grip of his hand as we parted. I saw them last standing in the doorway, Gorky tall, energetic, and harassed-looking, beside his small and fragile wife, though she also seemed to express a will-power nothing could shatter.

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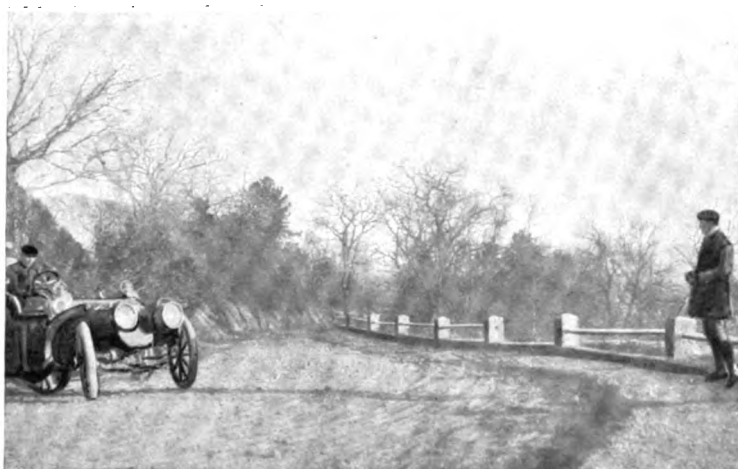
From Yalta we took the motor-cars and explored the neighbouring country. We ran through lovely pine forests, fields of snowdrops and primroses. The perfume of spring penetrated our hearts and nostrils; for this corner of the Crimea is celebrated not only for its beauty, but for the mildness of its climate. While we were driving in the woods of





THE PRINCIPAL SQUARE IN SEBASTOPOL

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IN THE CRIMEA ABOVE YALTA

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## The Crimea

Yalta we passed several peasant vehicles, in which, alas, the peasants were small and the horses enormous. Neither the one nor the other had ever seen a motor-car before, consequently, in spite of our pulling up at once (in the whole of our run we never killed so much as a foolish cockerel), the horses at once made for the ditches and hedges, as about to start a steeplechase. Their owners meanwhile fled, leaving us to catch their horses, while from afar they abused us vociferously. Once in a village a fanatic sprang upon Léonida's car, whirling a stout cudgel. We were afraid for the Princess Bibesco's head, as she was sitting with me at the back of the car. Before we had time to defend ourselves the blow fell, but luckily upon shoulders that were of small account. Meanwhile a wild-looking female left the bottle of vodka she was drinking to join her husband in a wild assault upon the 40 h.p., which was going at the rate of five miles an hour. This time a revolver was rapidly presented to them, at the mere sight of which the man fell into the ditch. We quickened our pace, but in spite of it a second later an immense stone thrown by the woman, and intended for our heads, crashed against the back of the car. A crowd of about twenty peasants had now collected, and it was obviously time to disappear, which we did as quickly as possible. But so did we narrowly escape being stoned like Christian martyrs in the fields of Yalta.

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Another day we went to Livadia, the summer residence of the Tsar, who that year, for very excellent reasons, remained at Tsarskoye-Selo. Livadia consists of an immense park, sloping down to the sea. A number of small houses are set among the lawns and trees for the housing of officials, the imperial suite, and the long-haired clergy. The Tsar himself occupies two pavilions, not one whit more elaborate than the rest. In one of them Alexander III died of a death many people still consider mysterious. In the other Nicholas II passed the last summer of his life. The rooms are small, and furnished much after the fashion of an old maid's possessing neither taste nor money. The summer residence of the Tsar of all the Russias, the autocrat who reigns over 140 millions, and whose fortune is incalculable, is absolutely without even the average comforts. A well-to-do shopkeeper of London would be housed more luxuriously. Only outside the Tsar's pavilion is a very beautiful show of flowers—tulips, roses, camellias, hyacinths, all clumped together in great effective masses.

Unfortunately there were as many soldiers as flowers. At every turn of the path one caught sight of a uniform. On the lawns soldiers were being drilled, others were sitting on the steps of the terraces. The touch of colour given by the uniforms was not unpleasant, only we felt it was a note carried to excess at Livadia. At every step, moreover, the guard who preceded us turned round to see

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what we were doing. Oppressed by this anxious watchfulness, we ended by feeling like children discovered in some act of mischief, and comically intimidated, commenced, as if we were in church, by speaking to each other in whispers.

## CHAPTER III

### THE CAUCASUS

THAT same evening, the 22nd of April, we left by boat for Batum, stopping on the way at Novorossisk. Here we were at last in the Caucasus, and had reached the final stage before arriving in our much-desired Persia. It was barely a fortnight since we had left Bucharest, but it seemed three months, so much had we seen, felt, and suffered. It was Sunday when we reached Novorossisk, and the church bells at the foot of the Caucasus were ringing as they might have done in any French village. Novorossisk itself, however, placed in a long and narrow bay, and sheltered from westerly winds, is a purely commercial port.

The weather was hot and the sun scorching, the barometer having fallen to 29.5 inches. They brought us a bundle of the latest newspapers, which a Russian official, with whom I had occasionally entered into conversation, offered to translate for us. As a personality he was charming, but of an unquenchable optimism. "Troubles in Russia?—There were none, except in the interested opinions of foreign correspondents. . . . Political assassina-

## The Caucasus

tions?—Simply isolated murders. . . . The Caucasus dangerous?—No country in the world could be more peaceable.”

We then ran through the foreign telegrams. At last, I felt, I should learn what was happening in Russia, especially in the revolutionary Caucasus to which we were travelling. Was Batum in flames? Should we find a viceroy at Tiflis? Unfortunately all the telegrams were solely concerned with foreign countries, and more especially with France. We read the first telegram—“Grave troubles at Limoges, the workmen break into the Haviland factory; the American flag hoisted.” Second telegram—“Revolutionary outbreaks at Limoges, a detachment of troops ordered to the spot.” Third telegram—“A motor-car set on fire. Soldiers attacked, fire upon the crowd.” And so on for four columns. My interpreter gazed at me a little sadly. “Will you always be revolutionaries?” he asked reproachfully. “The situation is evidently a very serious one. I meant to go to France this year for my summer holiday, but clearly it would be wise to delay the journey. I shall stay in Russia.”

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The rest of our voyage on board the “Grand Duke Boris,” which from start to finish danced on the waters like a thing gone mad, is best not referred to. It was of a nature to make one swear solemnly never again to journey with a member of the Russian

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

imperial family. Not one of us but was physically weakened by the time we reached our destination. Of Batum, moreover, our first impression was lugubrious enough. It was night, and the houses were closed and forbidding-looking. Obviously Batum was in a state of siege. Had we at last come to the heart of the troubles so long foretold us? Unfortunately all we were capable of feeling for the moment was the fact that we could barely stand on our feet for weariness. We got into two carriages and gave the address of the Hotel International. On leaving the quay we drove through a number of dark and narrow streets, regular cut-throat lanes. Presently, on the pavement in front of an open shop, we saw a little group of people. As we passed there was the noise as of a bursting bomb, a flash of light illuminated a figure near us, the man staggered, two more shots followed, and he fell forward on to the pavement. Our driver made the sign of the cross, then shrugged his shoulders, as if to say, "I have seen many others."

The horses meanwhile were plunging violently, and while he controlled them, a fat, comfortable-looking man walked past us. It was the assassin, who was leisurely departing. About twenty yards further on we stopped before an immense doorway, surrounded on either side by barricaded windows. This it seemed was our hotel. The coachman rang and a soldier half opened the locked door, reluctantly admitted us, and at once barred the door again



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behind us. All the staff apparently were on strike. There were no provisions, people refusing to trade with the proprietor, who for that matter had already been threatened with death by the revolutionary committee. We received a dreary impression of empty passages and of a ground-floor closed altogether, for fear of bombs. In the drawing-room above we had to sit without fires and in semi-darkness, drinking a cup of tea for all refreshment. Such was our welcome to the Caucasus.

The next morning there was sunshine, and Emmanuel Bibesco and I went out to inspect a town where apparently human life was not regarded as of any great value. Soldiers with fixed bayonets were everywhere, in front of the banks, the post offices, and at every street corner. Even the mail-carts passed with an escort of Cossacks. These precautions did not, moreover, seem superfluous, for the look on the workmen's faces was distinctly sinister. There were many emaciated, ragged-looking creatures about, with eyes as wild as they were cunning. Every nationality seemed represented. Not many Russians, but a heterogeneous collection of Armenians, Georgians, Turks, Jews, Tcherkesses, Tartars, etc., wandered idly through the streets near the harbour. One felt that only the grimdest repression kept them from pillage, though, as it was, private vengeance were satisfied unhindered with a knife or a revolver.

Strikes were numerous, for Batum is both indus-

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

trial and commercial. Nearly all the paraffin exported from Baku passes through Batum, most of it being refined in the Rothschild, Siderides, and Nobel factories. The rest is dispatched in the crude state. There is besides a big export trade in wool and carpets, most of the European business of northern Persia being transhipped from Batum. Consequently there are many factory hands and dockers, added to which, during the last few months an enormous number of Russian labourers had been driven there through want of work in their own cities. These men produced a surplus of workmen, and a general discontent skilfully exploited by the revolutionary committees. First the Rothschild and Siderides factories closed, while the Nobel only worked intermittently. Then for a time even the shipping companies ceased to call at Batum, a fact which not only accentuated the troubles, but produced violent threats of death to all the various consuls. The English, French, German, and Austrian boats, it was true, had by this time once more put in there, but no Russian vessels, all their engineers and firemen being still on strike.

Curiously enough, however, the wages of the dock-labourers are for the country extremely high. An eight hours' day is paid at the rate of 3s. 10d., and for every hour overtime 1s. 0½d. is allowed. On holy days and on the eve of holy days, which in this orthodox country are extraordinarily frequent, the tariff is doubled. One should mention also that

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living in Batum is extremely cheap, as for a penny or two one gets fish in abundance.

But matters when we were there showed no signs of improvement. The people's committees demanded that gangs of Georgians, Turks, Armenians, Greeks, and Russians should be employed alternately. Unfortunately out of all these only the Turks will work, or can be relied upon to fulfil the terms of their contracts. The rest are equally lazy and unreliable. Consequently no one could foresee a settlement, while, owing to the state of semi-anarchy into which the town had fallen, private vengeance were satisfied with impunity. True, I was informed by an official personage that the murderer whom we had seen in the very act on our arrival, had been arrested that night and hung in the citadel forty-eight hours later ; but I must add that this statement, when repeated to other officials, merely produced a curious expression of scepticism.

Our first personal inquiries at Batum were concerning the road over the pass of Akhaltsckh to Tiflis, when we learnt from the governor-general, to whom we had put the question, that owing to the heavy snowfalls all communication with Tiflis by that means was at an end. To reach the Caucasian capital by motor-car was therefore impossible—a bitter disappointment to the whole party. We determined instead to take the train to Koutaïs, and to see if from there one could reach Tiflis by the pass of Mamison and the Darial defile, following the

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

celebrated "military Georgian road." When we asked, however, about the trains to Koutaïs there was a moment's embarrassment. Finally we got the statement—"No, the trains are not running for the moment, but they will start again, certainly they will start again. We keep you to-day and to-morrow; after that, praise be to God! they will be running once more, and you will get to Koutaïs."

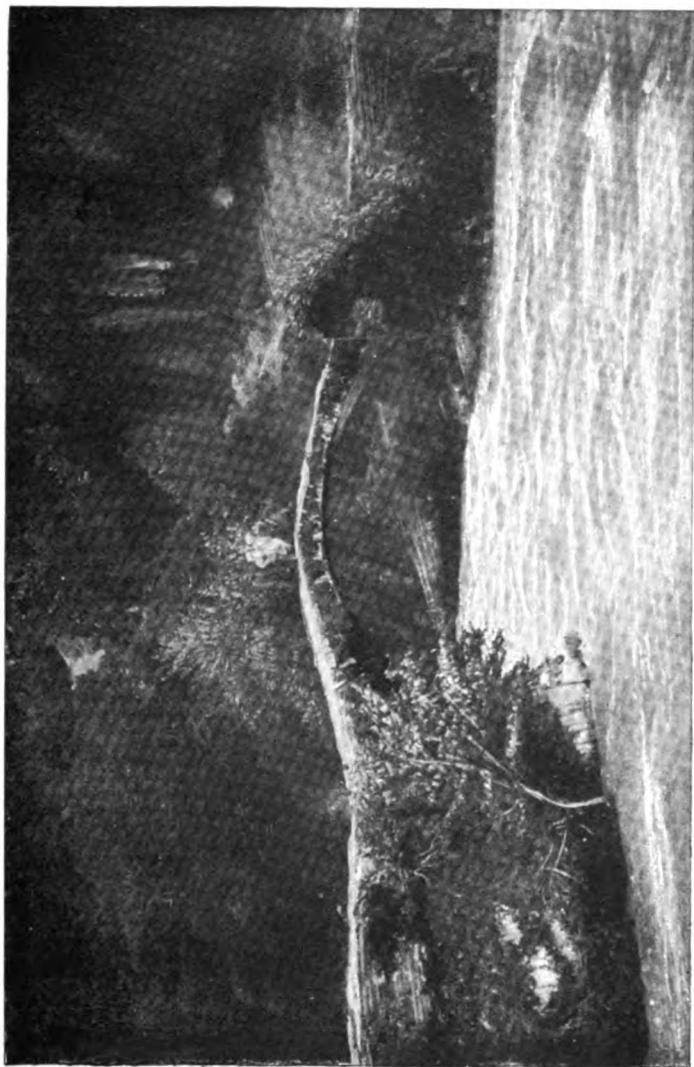
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That afternoon, having lunched at the Orient Hotel, since we were staying at the Medusa, we went for a drive in two of the cars.

But we were not by ourselves. The governor's ordonnance officer, who had come to the boat to meet us, now made a member of the party. He was of Georgian extraction, had studied at St. Petersburg, and as he both spoke French and knew the country, was a very agreeable companion. We had also a Cossack seated on the footboard.

The two gave us a warlike enough appearance. It is true many stories of brigands, of people carried off at the very gates of Batum, of defiant mountaineers who took advantage of the general unrest to raid the valleys, were current. However, we could now see for ourselves.

We drove through the Tchorok valley. The road was good and well kept, but horribly hard. Picturesque country-folk on horseback or on mules passed us from time to time, and, in spite of the



**A DANGEROUS BRIDGE ACROSS THE TCHOROK**

According to legend the blood of slaves was used instead of water to form the mortar)

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terror our cars caused their animals, were amused and smiling. Every six to twelve miles we passed a Cossack post, where the chief, informed by telegram of our coming, saluted the officer accompanying us, and reported: "All is quiet along the banks of the Tchorok."

Gradually the valley grew wilder and more narrow, while steep hills rose from the water's edge. Magnificently flowering rhododendron bushes growing among the rocks which overhung the road made like a dais of flowers for us. Wild azaleas also carpeted the fields, which ran in steep inclines to the road along which we drove.

An occupation for our Cossack, as well as an opportunity for him to draw his sword, had at last occurred. We sent him into the fields of azaleas and rhododendrons. His sword cut flowers excellently. We soon had a perfect harvest of fragrant blossoms in the cars, and looked like competitors in a battle of flowers.

The Cossack then got on to the step again, and we continued to search for brigands. Some women, veiled Turkish fashion, passed us on donkeys terrified by the cars. Others on foot precipitately left the road in order to hide themselves more effectually. Some Turks wore the *bachlik* on their heads as turbans.

But the day was closing, we had found no brigands, and we returned to lugubrious Batum, reaching it, as usual, only after night had fallen.

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We soon became blasé over the state of the town, curiosity leaving no room for terror. We ended by visiting the bazaars, and by mixing freely with its rather sinister population, accompanied only by an orderly in uniform, a person, moreover, none too well regarded by the fomenters of the disorders. If a bomb burst, we felt we were ready to share its fragments. The two women were equally courageous. Everybody agreed that we had no time to think of danger—emotion, as far as we were concerned, should be wholly a matter of retrospection. That same day we learnt that a train was actually leaving in the evening for Koutaïs. We at once decided to take it. We had seen Batum, with its streets deliciously lined with poplars, and were equally determined to visit Koutaïs, which was in the same state of internal disorder. It even appeared as if matters were being deliberately arranged for us ; we had reached Batum by the last boat to stop there, and left it by the first train which had run since the beginning of trouble.

When it did start, moreover, it was picturesque-looking enough. We had Cossacks on the engine, Cossacks on the steps of the carriages, and both driver and stoker carried loaded revolvers. We wondered if they feared an attack by the disaffected peasants. In answer we learnt that the whole country between Batum and Koutaïs was in a state of armed uprising. A short time ago a driver, getting down to grease his engine, had been shot





ESCORTED BY A COSSACK AND RUSSIAN OFFICERS

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dead, while the rails were constantly being torn up in various places. Consequently we proceeded with extreme caution, while at every station we passed through the platform was lined with soldiers. Personally we were well taken care of, for as a matter of fact we had not only the Government but the revolutionaries with us. At the station, while our cars were being put in, some workmen, overhearing the chauffeurs speak French, said to them, "Are your people French? In that case they can go anywhere," after which we felt immune from anxiety.

At eleven o'clock at night we reached Koutaïs. Why was it, I wonder, our fate always to arrive in unknown towns at night-time? As for Koutaïs nothing could be more lugubrious than our first impressions. We left our twenty-eight packages in charge of a hotel porter at the station, and started off in couples in the smallest of carriages for the Hotel de France. I started first, in charge of one of the ladies. We dashed over awful paving-stones, through endless deserted streets, in which not a lamp was lighted. Every house was in darkness, and to all appearances we might have been in a deserted city. The Tartar who drove us, moreover, whipped his horses as if he were taking us to the devil. In the natural course of events, it seemed to us, we ought long ago to have reached our destination. When I questioned him he merely answered by a further cracking of his whip, and by dashing us

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through a perfect labyrinth of little streets. Needless to say my revolver was sleeping peacefully at the bottom of my trunk. "Dear friend," said my companion, "there is no denying that we are wholly at the mercy of this man. What will he do with us?" And she still had the courage to laugh as she questioned. Eventually, since an end must come to all unpleasant experiences, we reached the hotel we longed for, to find, owing to the present state of the Caucasus, that a tourist now was almost an unknown quantity there.

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The first thing we did at Koutaïs was to rush to the bazaars, which, according to Baedeker, are famous. No country is peopled by a greater number of races than the Caucasus, and during our wanderings in the bazaars we saw at least a dozen different nationalities. It was difficult to distinguish one from another, but I could tell Armenians from Georgians, owing to the regular features of the latter; the Tartars I knew, because they slightly reflect the Mongol type; while the Tcherkesses were easy enough to recognize, as they all wear a sheepskin coat; the Russians were fair and greasy-looking; the Jews had hooked noses; and after a very few hours at Koutaïs I could make no mistake concerning the Immeritians, who are generally tall, fine-looking men, with prominent noses, almond-shaped eyes, good features, and magnificent beards.

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But these were the only types I could recognize, though, without distinguishing them, I was tirelessly interested by the picturesque costumes of the others. For two hours we mingled with the crowd under the little arches of Koutaïs, notwithstanding the fact that all we bought were some of the wallets which the mountaineers hang over the backs of their donkeys, and which are extremely decorative and very elaborately ornamented.

In the afternoon we paid a visit to the military governor—Koutaïs, owing to the riots, being under martial law. We found him an agreeable and hilarious old gentleman, Prince Orbéliani, who was much amused on learning that we had actually come to Koutaïs with motor-cars. We asked him if it was possible to go in them as far as Zoug-didi, in Mingrelia.

“Zoug-didi!” he exclaimed, and could say no more for laughing. He only regained composure in order to assure us that it was absolutely impossible to travel about his district. The rivers had overflowed, and all the roads and bridges had been swept away by the recent heavy rains. There was only one thing for us to do—to go by train as soon as possible to Tiflis. For that matter, however, all the charming governors who received us so courteously held this one idea in common—that of passing us on with the smallest possible delay to their colleague in the next district, with the view of escaping all responsibility for what might happen to us.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

From Koutaïs we made several excursions into the country, one up a steep hill to the monastery of Ghelati, where the good brothers raised their arms to heaven at the sight of our automobiles and the dangerous return ahead of us. Another to the ruins of a Genoese citadel of the fifteenth century, though, curiously enough, these citadels were to be found at every stage of our journey, even at Teheran itself, while I actually bought there a beautiful piece of Italian brocade, worked up in the Persian fashion. From our first tower, however, we got during a bright interval—it had been pouring all the way—a lovely view of Koutaïs, its terraces, its poplars, and the bright green foliage of its gardens.

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On Saturday, the 29th of April, we started for Tiflis. The train left Koutaïs at 9.15 in the morning, but it seemed as if none of us would be ready in time. At the last moment trunks were still unpacked, our handbags not done up, while the whole passage outside our bedrooms was in a state of absolute confusion. At half-past eight, when I was already panting to start, I found Emmanuel Bibesco leisurely demanding a barber. At twenty minutes to nine I tore him from the hands of his Figaro, and dragged him off to the station. Léonida, accompanied by his faithful Giorgi, followed us in the second motor. The two married couples were not yet ready. We had barely reached the platform

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when the bell rang twice, which throughout Russia means that in three minutes the train will leave the station. We were distracted ; but what could we do ? Bibesco flung himself upon the station-master and implored him vainly to wait for our unfortunate companions. But the train from Koutaïs connects at Rion with the Batum-Tiflis express, and if we once started late we should miss the connection.

We had one minute only in which to arrive at a decision. The couples left behind were absolutely without money, but that throughout our journey was a chronic calamity to all of us. Not that we lacked comfortable letters of credit, only unfortunately they were made out for some towns and not for others—added to which the Russian calendar is so excessively rich in saints' days that the banks were almost invariably closed when we wanted them. In addition we never realized the cost of our various journeys or the extent of our hotel bills when the servants were on strike, so that we were always short of money. Having hastily estimated our finances we took three tickets for Tiflis, leaving Giorgi behind with all the remaining roubles of our possession. The last bell went, the train started, and at that moment George Bibesco walked quietly on to the platform, to stare stupefied when he saw our waving handkerchiefs from a window of one of the departing carriages. As far as we were concerned we were almost equally horrified, for the train was no sooner gone out of the station than we

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

discovered that we had nearly the whole of the others' luggage, as well as Phérékyde's fur coat. All we could do was to make melancholy jokes on the state of mind of the others when they found themselves doomed to another day of the torrential rains of Koutaïs, and to comfort ourselves with the thought that after all they would be with us no later than the following morning.

Towards midday the train passed into the district of Gori, which for three months had occupied so much of the attention of the European newspapers. The peasants, desiring a sort of fraternal socialism, had revolted, and in order to obtain it had fired upon the Cossacks who patrolled the country. At Gori station, which was occupied by a military force, we rushed to the refreshment room, not only to be served by soldiers, but unfortunately to have food evidently cooked by them as well. During the afternoon we passed Mzet, the old capital of the Georgian empire, and caught a glimpse of the cathedral, built, according to legend, in the fourth century, on the spot where a Jew was supposed to have brought the coat of Christ.

Towards evening we reached Tiflis, to learn that half the town was on strike, all the hotels closed, and the tramways no longer running. All this would have troubled us very little if we had not at the same time been told that the railway men had decided to go on strike next morning, and that ours was the last train which would come through until



## The Caucasus

a settlement was arrived at. And our unfortunate friends were still at Koutaïs ! Consequently as we drove to the Hotel de Londres, where some soldiers did their best to welcome us, we were anything but cheerful. We had promised to reach Ispahan together, and this first separation had already taught us that we had no desire for any change of arrangement. The proprietor of the hotel had himself met us at the station, but, once in the house, asked permission to leave us. He returned presently dressed as a cook, in immaculate white garments. " It is the *chef* you now see, sir," he said with a sigh. " I am obliged to do all the cooking myself, and my mother, who is a lady, acts, with the help of my sisters, as chamber-maid." I am unaware of the value of the ordinary *chef* at the Hotel de Londres at Tiflis, but I know by experience that the proprietor is an excellent substitute, for during our eight days' stay there, in face of the incredible difficulty there was in getting provisions at all, he did us remarkably well. But that first night, having dined, we went to bed early, regardless of the fact that it was the eve of the Russian Easter, and that a midnight service was to be held at the old cathedral, which we had previously decided to go to. Reflecting sadly upon our friends at Koutaïs we had lost the desire for distraction. Happily the first sounds that woke us next morning were the voices of our two married couples in the passage outside our bedrooms. The train had run after all, and a

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minute later two irate husbands took revenge on us for all the trouble they had suffered through being left behind the day before.

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From the 29th of April to the 6th of May we remained in Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, and the actual residence of the viceroy of the Caucasus. It is a town picturesquely situated between two rocky heights, and crossed by the grey and tumultuous Kura. In spite of being served in the hotel by nothing but soldiers, we found Tiflis less in a state of siege than the towns we had previously passed through. Cossacks patrolled the streets, and the public gardens were full of soldiers, who, thanks to Easter, were lurching about in a state of unmistakable drunkenness. On the first day we walked through the bazaars, temporarily closed, and spent the afternoon first in the Botanical Gardens and then in the rocky heights which dominate the town from the south-east. The day was clear and beautiful, and the sun shone upon the valley of Kura, with its crowded collection of houses. At our feet, to the right, stood the old cathedral and the Armenian and Persian bazaars. Straight in front was the new quarter, the boulevard, and the governor's, as well as the public garden. On the far side of the river the ground rose abruptly, and was covered by the Georgian workmen's quarters, and finally by the Armenian convent, perched

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on a jagged height, behind which runs the railway line to Baku. For the next few days we were fully occupied, having with us several letters of introduction, and being everywhere received with the utmost warmth and courtesy. Though everybody's servants were on strike we lunched and dined out incessantly ; indeed, we seemed to be eating all day long, in preparation perhaps for future starvation when we got into the wastes of Iran.

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Escorted by the French consul we also haunted the bazaars, though I am sorry to say I found nothing in them of any interest. We ended by buying a few miniature guitars of black wood, inlaid with ivory, which are made in the Caucasus, and a few fire-arms, but nothing of any value. The real wealth of the bazaars of Tiflis consists in its carpets. One can buy there all those made in the Caucasus, Daghestan, Transcaspia, in Samarkand, Bokhara, Afghanistan, and Persia. For several hours they unrolled these before us. They were moderately cheap, and in many cases very beautiful. But we were on our way to Persia, where the most beautiful carpets in the world are to be purchased, and consequently we refused to buy any at Tiflis. We then went to visit the deputy-viceroy, to obtain facilities for local excursions. All he asked of us was reasonable notice beforehand, in order that a telegram might be sent ordering the Cossacks to patrol the roads

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along which we intended driving. Brigandage, it appeared, was temporarily the fashion. We decided to run to Mzet, on the Georgian highway, but the morning of our departure it poured in torrents ; it was, in fact, as if cataracts steadily fell from heaven, while the barometer remained well below thirty. We should be stuck in the mud before we could leave Tiflis, and the excursion was therefore abandoned for the time being.

Unfortunately every day it was the same story, and it never became possible to go at all. The inhabitants of Tiflis assured us that they had never before known such weather in May, but the rarity of the phenomenon was no consolation whatsoever, and gradually a general sense of discouragement seized the whole party. What should we do ? Wait ? It had already rained for three weeks, and was obviously quite capable of raining for another ten days, when the great heats would begin in Persia, and we should be unable to cross the desert to Ispahan.

Meanwhile we were asked to a *fête* given in one of the gardens of the suburbs of Tiflis, where in summer the inhabitants spend the evenings listening to music. As some of the national dances were to be given for us we accepted, but, owing to the weather, arrived with the motor caked in mud up to the axles. We then sat in a pavilion on the banks of the Kura, while a penetrating dampness rose from the ground at our feet, and, after a little

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time, rain commenced to fall again. Shivering, we listened to the distant sounds of a raucous flute, a drum, and a clarionet. Presently supper was served—some delicious trout, caviare, and chicken. This they call in Tiflis taking tea. Some black irises, regal and sad-looking, flowered each side of the walk upon which two Tcherkesses presently danced for us. But it was damp enough to kill anybody, and the raucous flute continued to wail rhythmically but unceasingly in the darkness. Afterwards we drank champagne, while one of our party danced some stirring and graceful Cossack dances. Finally we drove back to Tiflis, very nearly perishing ignominiously as we did so by sinking into the mud of the roadway.

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During our meals at Tiflis we were usually solely occupied with the question of how to proceed from there to Persia. Three different ways of doing so were open to us, and we had no sooner decided in favour of one than the strongest arguments sprang up on behalf of another. Then we discussed the whole question again from the beginning. This lasted for six days, that is, for twelve meals, not counting innumerable teas and private discussions in our various bedrooms. It ended by wearing us to fiddle-strings.

The two principal ways of getting to Persia from Tiflis were—overland by Erivan, Julfa, Tabriz, Mianeh, Kasvin, Teheran ; the other was by boat

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from Baku to Enzeli, and from there by road to Resht, Kasvin, Teheran. In the latter case the roads had been built by a Russian company, were said to be good, and were perfectly passable for motor-cars. The only difficulty about the Baku-Resht route was the disembarking at Enzeli. The mail steamer could not cross the Murdab bar, consequently one had to land some way off the shore by means of small flat boats. In addition, the shore is somewhat difficult. In winter five times out of every six, and in spring once out of every five, passengers cannot be disembarked at all. If there were the merest ripple it would be impossible to get our motors into the flat lighters. Consequently, as the spring that year was abominable, the Baku-Resht itinerary presented some considerable drawbacks.

We then wrestled with the Erivan-Tabriz route, but this, too, was full of disagreeable surprises. First of all, for a considerable part of the way there was no high road, that having been destroyed since the introduction of the railway. In order to obtain a monopoly of traffic the Russian Government, who built the line, had done away with all other means of transit. A truly simple manner of conducting business!

At Akstafa the road which runs through the pass of Delijan begins again, but from there onwards are nothing but streams and mountain-torrents to Erivan and Julfa, things harmless enough in

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summer, but at this time of year probably impassable. After much contradictory and depressing information we were introduced to some engineers whose business it was to look after the road to Erivan. Owing to the melting snow and recent heavy rains they informed us that it would be quite impossible to cross the swollen mountain streams that would intersect our road incessantly. This decided us to start for Baku. The next day, however, we met some journalists who had quite recently made the Erivan journey by carriage ; it was therefore obviously easy to do it. That flung us back upon the Erivan itinerary, only to learn that same evening that the Arax had overflowed and was unfordable, a party of forty-five Cossacks having recently been drowned there.

Once more we swung back to Baku. In the middle of the night we were roused with the ill-timed information that the Arax was once more passable. Next morning a merchant, who had come from Tabriz, told us that it was madness at this time of year to think of crossing the mountains between Julfa and Tabriz by carriage. Once more we cried, " Oh, Baku ! Baku ! " But a general's cook immediately afterwards confided to the hotel interpreter that the merchant was a liar, and that she herself had been by carriage from Julfa to Tabriz.

No wonder we continued harassed and unsettled. Some voted for the Baku-Enzeli route, some for the

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Julfa-Tabriz. Even the Lenkoran route found favour with one of us. Meanwhile it rained incessantly, and discouragement seized upon us all. Our useless motor-cars weighed on our spirits, and not one of us had the courage even to go and look at them in the garage of the hotel. The only contented members of the party were the three chauffeurs, who, after the insane expeditions they had reluctantly taken part in, were revelling in this temporary rest at Tiflis. They ate like six, smoked, and looked out on life with benign countenances.

The first person to come to a decision was Emmanuel Bibesco, and his was to return his motor-car to Marseilles by the first French boat from Batum. Fired by his example, I then proposed the following plan: We had, I said, left our homes and gone through many countries purely and solely with the object of visiting Persia, and from Tiflis there was at least one certain way of reaching the country of Firdusi and Hafiz. The revolutionaries still permitted trains to run to Baku, and the Caucasian Shipping Company not being on strike, on the following Sunday night a boat was to leave Baku—why not leave our cars therefore at Tiflis, take this boat, and arrive in Persia on the following Tuesday? Half an hour later unalterable decisions had been arrived at. The two young married couples, with Emmanuel Bibesco and myself, were to start for Baku, taking one of the motors with us on the chance of being able to land it at Murdab; if im-



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possible, it was to be returned to Baku. Léonida alone declared that he would reach Teheran by land and by automobile, and that he would go via Erivan and Tabriz, even if he were obliged to take the thing to pieces and to have it carried piecemeal on camels' backs across the mountains. Decisions made, peace once more entered our souls. Let it rain, blow, or snow, we had once more the security that in a few days we should enter Persia.

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While I was in Tiflis I tried to make everybody I met discuss the troubles in the Caucasus. I acquired information from all sorts of people—from the government officials to the journalists of the opposition. In the end I obtained some sort of idea concerning the cause and origin of the disorders growing everywhere in the country, and as these disorders seem likely to last for several years yet, the following notes may be worth recording. Travellers anxious to get hurriedly to Persia can easily skip reading this.

And first of all let it be stated that the political troubles which have broken out during the past year at almost every point of the immense Russian Empire have assumed in the Caucasus both a special character and an exceptional gravity. Here, to render the ordinary causes of discontent which are universal throughout Russia more acute, are added both racial and religious differences. The Tartars,

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Armenians, Georgians, Tcherkesses, and the twenty other races who live in the mountains and in the valleys of the Caucasus, have always been hostile to each other. For a time Russian power maintained a sort of precarious peace between them, but now that this power is both weakened and elsewhere engrossed, the old civil war has broken out between them again.

Everywhere the country is in a bad state, while in some places it is actually dangerous. The peasant is poor and taxes are heavy. Moreover the peasants, grown tired of cultivating the land for others—often for big landowners who do not live on their estates—refuse to pay their rents. One can hardly describe the Russian *moujik* as civilized, but the Caucasian peasant is less civilized still. Primitive and brutal, in several places a species of *jacquerie* has broken out. The landowners, thoroughly frightened, have fled for refuge either abroad or to Tiflis.

To re-establish order is almost impossible, the permanent causes being beyond the power of any police to cope with. As it is, when a whole village is in a state of revolt a squadron of Cossacks is dispatched to it, the *nagaïka* is used freely, a few fowls disappear mysteriously, and there is an end of the matter. The peasants do not pay their rents any more than before. Though the country itself is rich their poverty is extreme. I have heard them accused of idleness, but it is an idleness largely due to disheartenment. The Caucasian peasant feels

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that he has no chance of bettering his lot, and that all his labour benefits the landlord only. Friends of the peasants, whom I met even among the land-owners themselves, say—"Give the peasants the opportunity of working for their own benefit, and they will set to work with as much energy as any one."

Like the *moujiks*, they are intensely credulous. Revolutionary agitators, masking as emissaries of the Tsar, have persuaded them in certain places that they are entitled to take possession of the land, and just outside Tiflis some peasants, acting under this belief, actually arrived to divide the racecourse up into allotments for themselves.

As a means of pacification the Government at one time promised a distribution of crown lands, but in Koutaïs, where the trouble was most acute, there was little or no land to divide, and in other districts the method of allotment merely increased disaffection, for instead of the land being given to old inhabitants it was handed over to Russian emigrants. From all points of view the arrangement was a complete failure, for the Russian peasant acclimatizes himself badly in the Caucasus.

The agrarian question is further aggravated by a political one. The peasants, though of different races, are nevertheless Caucasians. They complain consequently of having Russian functionaries to govern them, ignorant both of their customs and their necessities. They add further that not only

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are these officials dishonest and rob them, but that Russian red-tapeism is intolerable. All important matters have to be settled in St. Petersburg, a distance of nearly two thousand miles away, with the result that in the appalling accumulation of ministerial documents—from Finland to the Caucasus, from Poland to Vladivostok—the delays, complications, and general futility is beyond description.

Personally I never met even a Russian, who, whether he belonged to the Government or not, did not raise despairing hands to heaven at the mere mention of the government offices at St. Petersburg. Small wonder that the Caucasians clamour to manage their own internal affairs, and prefer, if robbing is inevitable, it should at least be done by their own people.

In the towns the situation is not much better—strikes, assassinations, and massacres are unceasing. The Government flings the blame upon the Armenians; but in this I think the Government is mistaken. Unfortunately Armenians, though very numerous in the Caucasus, are by no means popular. The Government, Georgians, Mussulmans, Tartars, Tcherkesses, and Kurds, all equally hate them. For what reason?

To begin with, as every one knows, they lack orthodoxy, forming a church apart, of which the Catholics have their head-quarters at Etchmiadzin, near Erivan, the former centre of the old Armenian

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kingdom. Secondly, they are clever and energetic, and, whether justly or unjustly, are accused of growing rapidly rich at the expense of the population among which they live, whether agricultural, industrial, or purely commercial. At Tiflis, for example, all the wealth has passed from the Georgians—extravagant and thriftless—to the Armenians, newcomers, but as greedy as they are economical. Hence the hatred of the Georgians for the plutocratic Armenians, and the accusations made against them of being the authors of all the recent troubles.

Wherever money is to be made Armenians are to be found. Like the Jews, they possess extraordinary business aptitude. They are, in fact, the usurers of the East, hard and pitiless to those they ruin. That they abuse their power is certain, but the real cause of their wealth is nevertheless extraneous. The truth is that in the midst of a population which dislikes work, their industry is inexhaustible ; among people who know nothing of business, they possess the most keenly developed commercial instincts ; and among a race absurdly extravagant they practise the strictest economy. These are the real causes both of their success and of the hatred felt against them.

This hatred breaks loose all the more easily in times of disturbance, as Armenians are great cowards. I remember our little Persian servant, who was eighteen though he looked twelve, calling out on one occasion—"He is an Armenian, I will go and

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beat him." And nothing could express more closely the general mental attitude felt towards Armenians by the people among whom they live. The Armenian does not like a hand-to-hand fight ; he prefers to defend himself with bombs, this cold-blooded method of revenge being very typical of his character. At Erivan, where the Armenians are in the majority, they recently massacred a large number of Tartars by means of bombs.

Again, they are against the Government ; but who in Russia at the present day is with it ? Moreover, they naturally enough desire to live, and the Government not only allows them to be massacred wholesale, but has confiscated their goods and closed their schools. Small wonder, therefore, that they accuse the Government of actually inciting the Tartars against them. And certainly for a long time Russia's policy in the Caucasus has been that of crushing the Armenians. They have the audacity to be clever, and nothing causes a despotic government more uneasiness than intelligence.

It is well known that previous to the February massacres Tartars were allowed to carry arms both in the country and the towns, while Armenians were systematically refused permission to do so. The following story was told me as a true incident. Three Armenians, disguised as Tartars, asked for permission to purchase revolvers, on the plea that they were afraid of being attacked. They got it, and bought a dozen weapons. Some days later,

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going this time as Armenians, to make the same request, it was at once refused them. And yet it is perfectly obvious that it is invariably the Armenians who are attacked, and that they have never done more than try to defend themselves. The famous saying—"It is always the same who are massacred"—is nowhere truer than in the Caucasus.

The Government is under the delusion that the Caucasian troubles are fomented by secret Armenian revolutionary committees. This, I think, as I said before, is a totally erroneous notion. It is the Armenians who, constituting the commercial class in the country, suffer more acutely than any one else from the continuance of disorder, not to mention that it is always the Armenians who are massacred. All their interests lie in the re-establishment of peace and quietness. They desire a strong and just political power, who would protect them. The existing Government maltreats them, and they naturally enough want its annihilation. But what intelligent Russian does not equally yearn for the downfall of the present autocratic and bureaucratic regime?

But who then, one asks, are the real authors of all the trouble in the Caucasus? That they arose spontaneously, either in the towns or in the country, is incredible. True, the general economic and political situation has long been bad, in fact, deplorably so. But at the same time it has been cleverly exploited by the Social Democrats, whether

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Russian, Georgian, or Armenian. It is their emissaries who overrun the country, exciting the peasants not only to refuse to pay their rents, but to demand the property of their employers. It is they who have incited the innumerable strikes which have paralysed the normal life of the towns—at Tiflis, for instance, every single class of workman having at some time or other been on strike.

It is impossible not to see in this the effect of a concerted plan, devised by a class who maintain a constant state of agitation with a definite and political aim in view. The revolutionaries in fact found and have seized an opportune moment for carrying into effect the reforms they ask for. In every stratum of the working community they have supporters, and everywhere they offer to it a clear and explicit programme. Employers now find themselves confronted by the definite claims of workmen convinced that justice is wholly on their side.

I have personally seen the effect of all this in the new attitude of domestic servants. They demand shorter hours, wholesome food, medical attendance in case of illness, politeness on the part of their employers, and a valid reason in case of dismissal. Nowhere in the world, not even in the United States, where the servant question has reached a crisis, are domestics granted as much as is asked for here.

But the ultimate aim of the revolutionaries is obvious—to create such universal disorder that the



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Government will be obliged to grant the political reforms demanded.

Fortunately for us while we were at Tiflis, the theatres were still open, for which we felt grateful to the revolutionary committee. At the Grand Theatre, which is really big and luxurious, we saw the French play "*Coquin de Printemps*," arranged as light opera by Strauss, and "*Sapho*," played by Iaworskaia, known as the Russian Réjane. But the spectators interested me even more than the plays, and I spent my time trying to discover pretty women among the audience. They were there for the seeking, and it is not without cause that the Georgians have for many centuries been renowned for their beauty. In the old days, as one knows, all the loveliest slaves of the harems came from Circassia. Now the Turks have discovered that one legitimate wife is sufficient for a man's unhappiness (or what is more rare, for his happiness), and the beautiful Georgians are no longer led off into slavery. But that night at the theatre I had the felicity of seeing two beautiful examples of the type—young, fresh, with regular features, impassioned eyes, beautiful figures, and the proudest possible carriage of the head. A learned German once informed me that seventy languages are spoken at Tiflis. I am quite prepared to believe him, but should have been perfectly happy if I could have spoken one only—that of those lovely ladies.

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George Bibesco, meanwhile, had engaged an interpreter—a Tcherkess called Hassan. This Hassan was supposed to speak Russian, French, and Persian. Whether he could speak Persian or not I was not in a position to ascertain, but his French was confined to gestures, as, for that matter, so was our Russian. Nevertheless, dressed in the national *bourka*, and wearing across his chest twenty-four little flasks which ought to have contained ammunition, but into which we stuffed face-powder for our two ladies, he was magnificent to look at, and enormously increased our prestige at Tiflis.

All this time it was still raining, and while on this subject there is one discovery I made in Tiflis which I may as well mention before going further. Travelers assert that the Caucasus is a mountainous district. Geographers support this assertion, and even maintain that there is a Kasbek with a summit more than 15,000 feet, and an Elburz 15,750 feet above sea-level. But Descartes, in his "*Discours de la Méthode*," declares that one should never accept anything as true that one has not personally proved to be so. Also I remember an axiom—"Experience is the mother of science." On these grounds I give the lie direct to all geographers and to all preceding travellers. I was three weeks in the Caucasus, living at the foot of the spot upon which they declare the Kasbek rises, and I solemnly proclaim that I never saw the Kasbek. Neither did any of my friends, though one of them, in order to attain a

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temporary superiority, swore that he had caught a glimpse of it for a second. Obviously he was dreaming. Therefore neither the Kasbek nor the Elburz are in existence.

On the strength of my experience all geographies ought to be revised. The Caucasus is not a country of high mountains ; there are a few fair-sized hills, and that is all. As for regarding it as a second Switzerland, that is a madness born in the brains of some jealous Russians, anxious to go one better than any other country. When, under my instructions, all geographical notices are rewritten, it will be stated that nowhere does the sky hang nearer to the earth. I should reckon it to be hardly three thousand feet off, and sometimes even less. In addition it will have to be noted that the sky is perpetually melting into water. This phenomenon is without explanation, and will have to be merely stated until the day when some one arises who can account for it.

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We spent two days buying the absolute necessities for our Persian journey, and the first of these consisted of camp-beds for us all. When one has never travelled except on the great international expresses or on the big Atlantic steamers, it is difficult to imagine a country without beds to sleep in. The first time a friend in Paris, who had been to Persia, said to me, "Remember to buy a bed," I merely smiled blandly ; the idea seemed to me both imprac-

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ticable and foolish. Now I knew better. In Tiflis we invested in some fairly comfortable camp-beds, which, folded up, occupied no more place than a roll of rugs, and weighed about twenty pounds each. For a mattress we had nothing but sacking, until one of us conceived the brilliant idea of buying a sheet of waterproof, in order to protect us from the damp rising from the ground, it being evident that we were not going to the regions of parquet floors. Besides our beds we added to our luggage about eighty pounds of jams, hams, sundries, *foie gras*, potted veal, biscuits, preserves, bottled vegetables, and even some cheese; our interpreter, who had already travelled in Persia, also advising us to add a couple of saucepans, as the Persians consider us "unclean," and would not be likely to allow us to touch their cooking utensils. In the end we bought not only the saucepans, but twelve plates, salt, sugar, tea, chocolate, lemons, towels, and napkins. In fact, one might have thought we were starting housekeeping, or, like children, were preparing to play at "dinners." Gradually the Hotel de Londres became one sea of parcels. In addition to everything else we had to buy waterproofs, for though we had all bought new ones on leaving Roumania, not even they could withstand the deluges which we had suffered.

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Our departure took place on Saturday. In the morning we went to the bank to draw the necessary

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money, for, owing to Easter, they had been closed on the previous Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. Nevertheless, when we arrived on the Saturday it was once more not open. It was apparently the birthday of the nephew of an uncle by marriage of the Dowager Empress. This left us without a farthing, though it was imperatively necessary for us to start without delay. With the calm decision, therefore, which never deserted us even in the most critical moments of our journey, we decided not to pay our hotel bill, but to collect the combined cash of the party and stow it away in Emmanuel Bibesco's pocket. To refer to Bibesco's pocket—though he was ostensibly supposed to be our treasurer—is a mere euphemism : it was really mine. For he started without a pocket-book, and refused to buy one. Then, when we saw him carelessly stuffing ten, twenty, and one hundred rouble notes into his trouser pocket we literally groaned, and I was constrained to offer to put them into the comparative safety of my own letter-case. This apparently was the very thing he wanted ; he took me at my word, and immediately handed over to me the funds of the party. Eventually each member became equally confidential, until I was loaded with everybody's passports, letters of credit, etc., and by the time we left Bessarabia my pockets had become so swollen that I could neither button my coat nor see my toes. Certainly the next time I go on an adventure of this nature I also shall

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take the precaution of leaving my pocket-book behind me.

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We started on Sunday, the 7th of May, and from Tiflis to Baku the train took eighteen hours. But, like all Russian trains, though slow it was comfortable. It has not yet entered the minds of Russian railway officials to huddle six people into a first-class compartment. The *coupés* are for two persons only, and in the ordinary compartments, though there are places for eight, the seats are much wider than with us, and the carriage itself is much larger. Each carriage has also a little table by the window, and at night the conductor arranges four beds to a compartment. In the expresses, by paying a rouble extra (2.65 francs) one can have sheets and a pillow-case. Railway travelling, too, is much cheaper than in France. From Batum to Baku, a distance of 526 miles, the ticket is 50 francs, while from Paris to Marseilles, a journey of about the same distance, we pay 96 francs. Still, to be just, one should mention that the Russian journey takes just about twice the time of ours.

We travelled all night, and when we woke in the morning the train was passing on the left the first heights of the Caucasus, whilst on our right stretched the desolate steppes of Kura, a marshy, scorched, fever-haunted plain, without an undulation, without so much as a fold of earth for many weary miles. Birds of prey fly across its dreary surface—rose-

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coloured falcons, kestrels, and ponderous eagles ; also jackdaws and snipe. Here and there we came across the miserable hut of a railway employé, round which some unhealthy-looking children would be playing. At rare intervals a few sheep and camels could be seen grazing on some tough and yellow grass.

By midday the scene changed, and a sea alternately grey, blue, and gold in the sunlight sprang before our eyes. We had reached the Caspian. Its shores were bare, and bordered by barren hills of clay that looked as if they had been peeled. But presently on our left arose what appeared a dense forest of unknown trees, above which hung a dense black cloud. They turned out to be the closely-packed chimneys of the Bala-Khaneh petroleum mines, probably the thickest grove in the world of these extraordinary wooden chimneys.

Any one with a passion for soldiers should go to Baku. Literally they overrun the place, in spite of the fact that they did nothing to prevent the Armenian massacres that took place in February before we got there. Indeed, the inhabitants complain that they are robbed by brigands by day and fleeced by the soldiers at night. We hired two light pair-horsed carriages, driven by Tartar coachmen, and went to see Bibi-Ebat, a petroleum factory on the sea-shore. The place was like a forest of stumpy, angular, and tarred derricks, out of which poured volumes of thick black smoke, while an

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opaque dark cloud hung immovably above. The noise of the pulleys round the borings was incessant. Great pipes ran along all the roads, while the ground was black and greasy, and to right and left were pools of petroleum. The derricks, besides, are run up so close together that they almost touch. The level of the petroleum underneath is very unequal, and in one place a derrick gives nothing, while five yards further on there are three or four that bring in a fortune. We trotted slowly through this monstrous harvest of derricks, but once past them, and on our return journey, the coachmen, evidently in need of amusement, commenced racing each other. The one temporarily ahead would drive his carriage from side to side in order to prevent the other passing him. It might have been exciting enough as a turn in a hippodrome, but we were in the carriages, and found it less amusing. More than once we were within an ace of being thrown into a ditch of petrol. Vainly—in our most polite language—did we request the drivers to cease ; for all answer they shouted "*Souda! souda!*" and continued racing. To this day I can see their little fat and sunburnt faces, and their gleaming eyes wild with the excitement of the moment. Finally our carriage shot past the other and secured the victory, after which, fortunately, we trotted calmly back to Baku.

At Baku we walked through the old Persian village and admired the ancient Virgin's Tower, built, according to legend, by the daughter of a



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Tartar king, who eventually, to avoid dishonour, flung herself from the top into the sea that in those days washed the foot of it. Since then the sea has receded and a wharf has been built there, apparently for the purpose of allowing Russian troops to drill on it. The old fire temple we did not see, for, so tragic are the ways of modernity, it had now been turned into a candle factory.

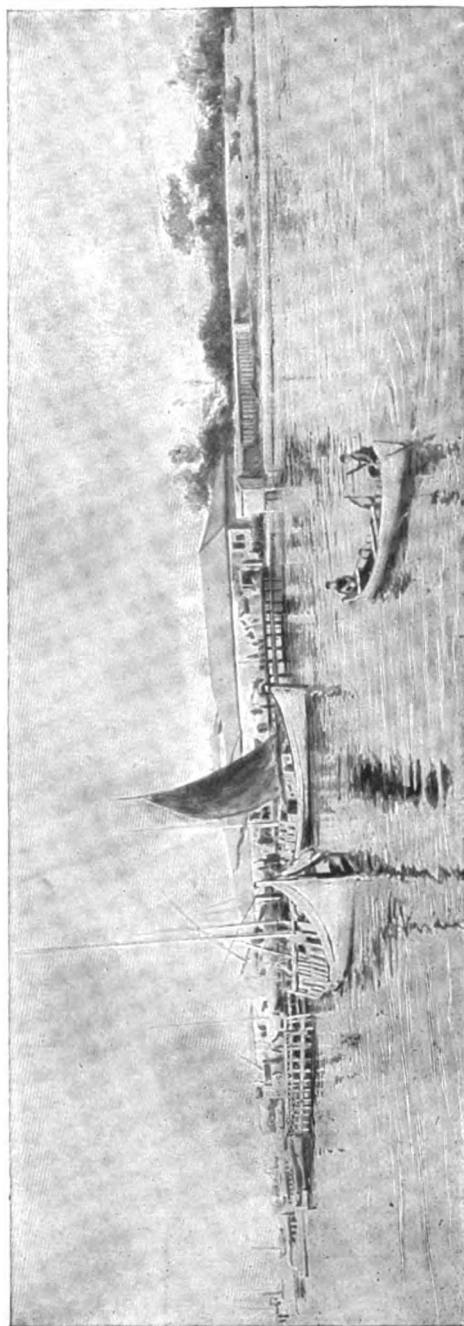
At the hotel one poignant remark was made to us. A Baku inhabitant, hearing that we were on our way to Persia, said to me sadly, "So you are going to Persia—what luck! There at least you will be in safety." At ten o'clock that night we embarked on I know not what grand duchess of a vessel. Up to the last we had been terrified lest another strike should be started and we should after all not get to Persia ; but the anchor was raised, the boat stole quietly away from the darkness of the shore, into which fell a thousand little lights from the town above it. Baku seen at night from the sea is truly beautiful. Nevertheless we left it without repinings, aware that when we next landed we should be at last in Persia.

## CHAPTER IV

### OUR ARRIVAL IN PERSIA

ON the way to Persia we anchored for five hours in sight of Lenkoran, a little Russian town set in a girdle of trees, while behind it, covered with great forests, rise the mountains of Ghilan. A soft blue mist filled the atmosphere, and gave to the country the unreal and attractive look which one so often finds in Flemish landscapes. It is, notwithstanding, one of the most unhealthy places in the world, as well as one of the wildest. A few years ago, it seems, even tigers were still to be found in its mountains.

From there we went on to Astara, the Russian frontier. A boat-full of much-decorated officials left the shore and boarded us. A minute examination of passengers followed, and for the hundredth time we produced our passports. At night we left again, this time for Enzeli. By now only one thought lay in the minds of all of us—should we be able to land next morning? If the sea were rough the boat would ignominiously return us to Baku. To increase anxiety the barometer was falling and the boat was beginning to roll distressfully. Happily



OUR ARRIVAL IN PERSIA. THE PORT OF ENZELI

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## Our Arrival in Persia

when we reached Enzeli, though the weather was showery and a fresh breeze roughened the water, the captain declared that we could be landed without danger. A damp mist swathed the coast and we could only dimly discern flat-looking houses, a tower, and a few trees. But it was Persia, and we gazed at it with all our eyes. A small launch rapidly drew alongside the steamer, but oh, how it rose and fell on the swelling sea! To land the motor-car was out of the question; we might be congratulated if we managed to get into it ourselves without damage. We had to wait for the moment when a wave lifted the little boat alongside of us. Then, when it was on the top of a wave, we reached out to an iron bar, which in finer weather served as a support for its canvas awning. Two sailors gave us a shove, we sprang, and two others then caught us on the deck of the launch, which immediately plunged once more into the trough of the sea. Ten minutes later we had reached the quay of Enzeli, and were at last really and truly in Persia.

We did not, however, land. The courteous Belgian custom-house officials who arrived, accompanied by an unmistakably Persian crowd, merely came on board to us. Among this accompanying crowd some of the men wore the national *shako* of black astrakhan, while nearly all were dressed in robes of flowing brown. Occasional beards of light mahogany added a charming note to this exotic

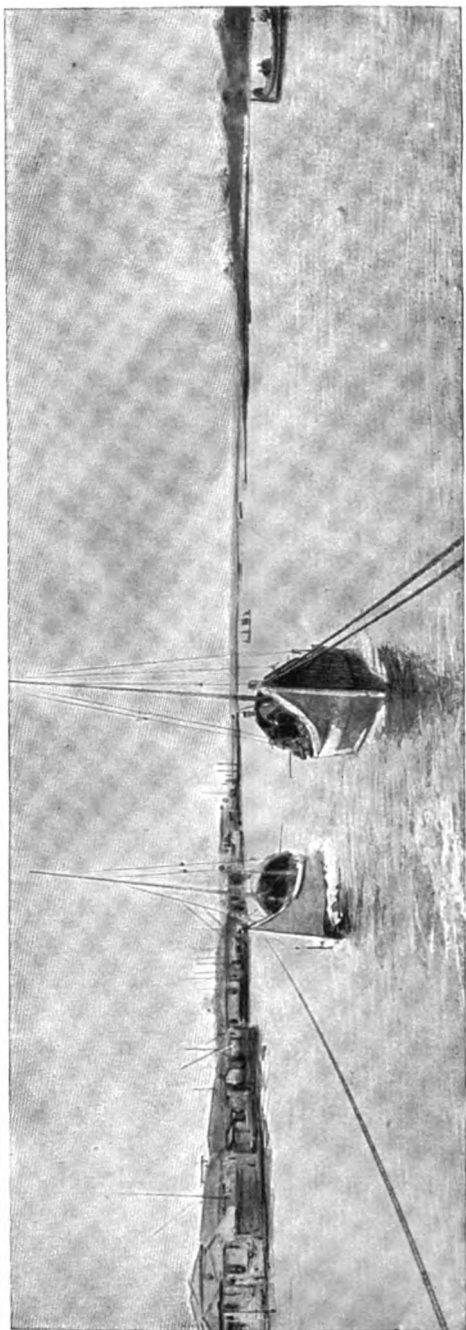
## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

company. They stared at us with undisguised curiosity—a curiosity fully returned, however.

. . . . .

The country round was flat, with reedy streams, brilliant green trees, and much water. On each side of the wide channel which connects the Caspian with the inland sea of Murdab rose platforms erected on piles, on which stood little low thatched cottages, open in front and decorated with matting. On these wooden platforms are heaped all sorts of goods, brought there by flat-bottomed boats, pointed and raised at bow and stern, and carrying a big lugsail. The water was grey, the sky both grey and low. Between these two warm greys the various notes of colour—the brown of the piles, the thatched roofs, the slender ropes and masts, the intense green of the reeds and trees, and the yellow of the sails reflected in the water—all blended into a delicious harmony of brightness. Immense flocks of cormorants passed over the water. They filed by in hundreds, turning and swirling above us. But the air was heavy, fever-laden and damp.

In our little launch we crossed Lake Murdab, towing two boats—one for our luggage, and one for ourselves. A steaming vapour rose from the surface of the water, and as we sat on deck, drinking tea and watching the flight of the cormorants, it commenced to drizzle a little. At the mouth of the river Pir-i-Bazar, we left the launch and went on



OUR PERSIAN BOATS BEING TOWED ON THE MURDAB

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## Our Arrival in Persia

board a small boat. Eight great fellows, wearing brimless beaver hats, then rowed us up the river, that wound in and out among the reeds and other water plants. On the banks besides were a number of hazel trees, sheltering a little world of birds—snipe, heron, kites, and falcons, none of whom took the slightest notice of us.

Gradually the river became too narrow for rowing, and the men, jumping on shore, seized a rope attached to the mast and commenced towing us. We wondered why the rope should be fixed to the top of the mast, obviously already bending under the strain. And as a matter of fact it presently snapped altogether, and flung our towers head foremost into the mud. Nevertheless they immediately refastened the rope as high as they could get it. A few minutes later we passed a junk, packed with a number of extraordinary boxes, upon which were seated a group of men and some veiled women. I suddenly understood the reason for our apparently idiotic rope arrangement, for, as we crossed, their rope slipped beneath ours, and the two boats were able to pass without stopping.

At last we arrived at Pir-i-Bazar. There a plank was thrown from the boat to the bank, which consisted of thick sticky mud, rising somewhat steeply from the river, so that we had the greatest difficulty in getting up it. On the top some carriages were waiting for us, and a whole population of drivers and porters, who would very soon have stolen part

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

of our luggage if we had not watched the unloading of it with a lynx-like attention. Fortunately two Cossacks from the Russian consulate at Resht rode up to our assistance. A procession was formed, and we started on our six-mile journey from Pir-i-Bazar to Resht. The roads were in a fearful condition after the recent rains, and by motor-car would have been impossible. Half-way there we were met by some horsemen sent from the governor of the town, one of the sons of the Shah, to accompany us. A little further on one of the big officials—admiral, as far as I could understand, of the Persian fleet!—had sent some beautifully caparisoned horses for our use, while one of the horsemen who accompanied them presented us with a letter, in which the *salar*, or admiral, stated that he put one of his houses at our disposal. This offer, however, we could not accept, being already the guests of the Russian consul.

Our progress was slow, owing to the deep and treacherous ruts in the road. But with the Cossacks who preceded us, and the grooms leading our superbly caparisoned horses (etiquette apparently did not allow us to ride them), and the Persian horsemen who followed behind us, we looked rather like a circus about to enter a new town. It was noon when at last we entered a garden, in which stood a large square brick building built in the European fashion. This was the Russian Consulate.

The consul, Monsieur Olférieff, received us in the



THE START FROM PIR-I-BAZAR

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## Our Arrival in Persia

heartiest manner, offering all the hospitality he had at his disposal—great empty rooms, which revealed to us even at that early stage that our camp-beds were not going to prove a useless encumbrance, but were the most essential equipment of our journey.

Resht is the capital of Ghilan, a province which borders the south-west of the Caspian Sea. This country, situated at the foot of the great chain of mountains which separated us from the tableland of Iran, is damp, hot, luxuriant and unhealthy. A Persian proverb says concerning it—"If you have an enemy, get him named governor of Ghilan!" Nevertheless Enzeli-Resht is a perfect paradise of green, slumberous waters, rice-fields, water-lilies, reeds, irises, a land of daisies and lilies growing to such a height that one could easily get lost in them. Pierre Loti, returning from Ispahan, passed through Resht, but he did not stop there, and naturally never really saw it. I can consequently confidently tell him that Resht is the most exquisite spot in the whole of Persia, at any rate according to the opinion of Emmanuel Bibesco.

The town, which is fairly large, is entirely surrounded by water, gardens, and avenues of old trees. The bazaar, which is not covered in, is both picturesque and animated. We drove through it, accompanied by Cossacks—not that there was any danger, but because we were the guests of Russia,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

and the upholding of European prestige was necessary. In the bazaars the great feature is the velvet of Resht, and the great industry the embroidering in gold of the velvets manufactured in the town. Unfortunately, though the material is handsome, the designs are anything but artistic. A few carpets are also sold in the bazaars, though the majority are taken straight to Enzeli, and from there to Baku. As we strolled through the shopkeepers were sitting on the threshold of their shops, while strictly veiled women—even the eyes being hidden—were buying the stuffs with which to make themselves charming in private life—out-of-doors conventionality forcing them into an ugly though striking uniformity. Through the crowd some little grey donkeys, with richly embroidered saddles, were being driven, while the sun fell with an illuminating fierceness upon the small blue enamelled towers which rose here and there in the bazaars.

From there we passed by the governor's palace, admiring the picturesque oddity of the Persian military uniforms, skirted a little low mosque, and suddenly came upon an open place in which a great crowd was collected. Here rows of veiled women sat along a building with wooden pillars, while the three other sides of the square were filled with men and children. In the centre of the square itself was a small platform, and on it a group of people, either sitting or standing. Our excitement instantly became intense, for undoubtedly we had stumbled



A *TAZIEH*, OR MYSTERY PLAY, IN PERSIA  
(We had just time to take the photograph before an incensed Mullah obliged us to leave the square)

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## Our Arrival in Persia

upon a representation of one of the *Taziehs*, or Persian mystery plays, concerning which Gobineau has written so interestingly.

On the platform the actors were representing "the people of the tent," that is, the unfortunate Alydes and Imam Hassein, with their women and children. At the moment they were meant to be in the dreary plain of Kerbela, scorched by the sun and devoured by thirst, while round them were supposed to be the troops of the Khalif Zezyd waiting to slaughter them. A heap of straw quaintly represented the sand of the desert, and before speaking the actor took a handful of it and scattered it over his head, thus by the simplest and most primitive of conventions conveying the idea of stage properties and scenery. Meanwhile as I listened to the drawling intonations on the platform, I could almost guess the tragic words of the religious and patriotic drama which was being given for the faithful. Some Persians in front of us, moreover, courteously made room for our party, and we seized the opportunity, therefore, of taking a few very interesting photographs.

Gradually all the audience saw us, and became instantly far more interested in the foreigners than in the sacred tragedy. This sacrilegious distraction by no means pleased the Grand *Mullah*, who was, as it were, presiding over the exhibition. Rising indignantly, he vehemently harangued the crowd, reproaching it bitterly for a profane curiosity con-

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

cerning "impure," accursed Europeans, who should be rather an object of loathing than interest to all faithful Mussulmans. At this point the consulate interpreter signed to us to retire, as things might easily become unpleasant, and we therefore withdrew dejectedly to our carriages, while all the faces of the women—mere white squares framed by a black veil—turned simultaneously in our direction to watch us drive off.

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From there we explored some of the country round Resht, driving along the elm-tree walks that line the banks of the bluey-green rivers. The sun had dispersed the mists, and we could see to the south the high, forest-covered mountains, which we should subsequently have to cross in order to reach Teheran.

On our drive we stopped in front of the country garden of a rich Persian. We were already acquainted with the customary native hospitality, which consists of allowing strangers to visit any house, while the owner retires so as to enable them quietly to enjoy his home or garden. If he appears at all it is only later to offer either coffee or ices. We therefore walked about the paths, under great flowering lilacs, that flung their shadows over beds of fragrant lilies. Then we went through the house, furnished unfortunately, as are the houses of all rich Persians, in the European fashion. Only the

## Our Arrival in Persia

carpets were of home manufacture. A little *hammam* stood at the side of the house.

Presently our host came to greet us and offer us some refreshments. He could speak French, and, going into the garden with us, gave us a great bunch of flowers. The view from the terrace of the wooded country which extended to the mountains, mistily blue in the distance, was very beautiful. We asked our host if he lived here. "I have this house in the country," he answered, "in order only to come when the nightingales sing in springtime."

At sunset we returned to the consulate. The damp was rising from the rice-fields on each side of us as we did so. Soft mists, like the diaphanous veils of fairies, lay motionless beneath the trees of the park at Resht. We could hear the croaking of a toad and the slow cadenced note of the camel bells, hung round the necks of the camels which were arriving in long files from Kasvin and Hamadan. The caravans never travel save after sunset, and we could just see between the trees great mysterious-looking forms, which swayed as if through the swell of a rhythmic sea. This tinkling of camel bells we were to hear plenty of before morning, for it was our first trial of the camp-beds, and though we finally got used to them, they proved somewhat hard at first.

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Meanwhile we were without news of the chauffeur Keller, who should have embarked at Baku with

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

the large Mercédès. Emmanuel Bibesco and I therefore decided to push on to Teheran by taking a Persian carriage. The others would either overtake us on the road, or join us shortly afterwards in the capital itself.

To go from Resht to Teheran we took the famous road built a few years ago, not by the Government, but by a Russian company, who obtained a concession to do so. In order to use it one has to pay toll. Carriages and caravans pay at a rate which for a carriage with four horses works out at eight *tomans*, a coin which, at the present appalling currency in Persia, has fallen from ten to four francs. The cost of keeping up the road is considerable, owing to the inclemency of the climate—deluging rains, a six months' drought, and the fact that in the spring the snows melt in a few hours, and the torrents sweeping down from the mountains swell until they become headlong rivers. Consequently the Russian company loses money by it, though this it hopes to recoup through the port of Enzeli, of which it has now obtained the monopoly, and where it is building a long jetty, so that boats can safely come alongside. In a few years, indeed, travellers will no longer know the uncertainties of the present landing in the open sea at Enzeli.

Financially, therefore, the road for the moment is a bad speculation ; nevertheless, from a political point of view, it is of the greatest use to Russia. For, thanks to this road belonging to them, Russia

## Our Arrival in Persia

would in case of need be able to transfer in a few days an army corps from Baku to the very enamelled gates of Teheran itself, while in times of peace it is in possession of a safe road for its merchandise. No European goods are allowed to reach Persia across the Caucasus ; thus all competition is done away with, while Russia holds in her own hand the principal part of the carrying trade of the country. All travellers must use this road, so that one reaches the capital of Persia in a sense through Russian territory. At every stopping-place there is a postmaster who speaks Russian. About every thirty miles, moreover, there is a toll-house, called *zastava*, which is also controlled by Russians. A telephone goes from *zastava* to *zastava*, until it ends in the office of our powerful host the Consul-General of Russia. One has thus the impression from the Caspian to Teheran of never having left, politically at least, the colossal empire of the Tsars.

. . . . .

We had decided to start at eight o'clock on a Wednesday morning, and had ordered our carriage from the Russian jobmaster, who holds all the business in his hands, and supplies dangerous vehicles and worn-out horses. The cost of a carriage for two persons, without much luggage, was nearly seven hundred krans \* from Resht to Teheran, plus eighty krans toll, and two or three krans tip to a fresh coachman at every halting-place.

\* About 280 francs.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

The postal journey from Resht to Teheran takes about fifty hours, when only stopping to change horses. But as we were not parcels, going by parcel post, we decided to take the journey comfortably, and to stop one night at Mendjil, and one at Kasvin. In this fashion, "*inch Allah*" (D.V.), we should reach Teheran in three days' time.

Having ordered our carriage for eight o'clock, it finally arrived at ten. It was the most ancient of four-wheeled carriages, with springs tied up with string. The hood would not meet above our heads, and the doors had obviously not been opened for fifty years at least. We solved the difficulty of getting in at all by jumping over them.

While our luggage was being tied on, the coachman, a great sunburnt creature with a Persian felt cap, stood at the horses' heads and whistled to them a mysterious tune we were to hear many times on our travels through Persia. He had refused to have anything to do with our luggage on the plea that the moment he left his horses they would bolt down the road. When finally everything was ready for the start, two Cossacks took his place at their heads, he jumped on to the box, called out violently to let go, and the four horses, with their ears set back—trotted slowly along the road to Teheran. The poor beasts were dead beat before we started.

## CHAPTER V

### FROM RESHT TO TEHERAN

WE drove at about the rate of six miles an hour, but that was quite sufficient to make us feel every single stone and unevenness of the road. The springs of our carriage were simply and purely ornamental.

The weather was damp, the atmosphere grey. Presently we passed through a forest and came upon some wonderfully luxurious vegetation. There were beeches, large-leafed maples, plane trees, and elms, while great hedges of briar and bindweed stretched on either side of us. A deep stream ran along the road. Further on small Indian oxen grazed in the thick grass, or fled into the glades as we approached. Occasionally we came across a few sparse cottages, in the gardens of which women, dressed in some light materials, were working. The moment they saw us they drew their veils back across their faces.

Suddenly our horses shied violently and drew the carriage into the ditch of running water which skirted the roadway. We had only just time to spring out, but the coachman, flung violently from

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

his seat, picked himself up without the least signs of either haste or astonishment. While the horses slaked their thirst in the pure water, we discovered the cause of the accident. It was not difficult, for the smell was enough to kill one. Right across the road in front of us a dead camel was rapidly putrefying. Just where it had fallen it had been left to linger until a slow and painful death overtook it. When we came across the thing this could only have been a matter of a few days, for the body was nearly intact, jackals having so far only eaten the stomach and thighs. Later on they and the sun together would do away with all but the skeleton ; but at the moment there it lay, with its neck suppliantly outstretched, poisoning the atmosphere. Fortunately none of our wheels were broken, and ten minutes later, having got the carriage on to the road again, we continued—in a state bordering upon asphyxia—our slow and painful progress.

During the afternoon we reached the first heights of the mountains, which were still covered by forests. Along a road bordered by endless trees we drove between hedges of delicate bindweed, while from time to time the powerful smell of elder bushes was wafted out to us, and we could see in the distance a wood of old olive trees, whose tortuous trunks bore little shoots of silver foliage. Once we passed some camels grazing on the grass, and saw a caravan waiting for the evening in order to move on again. To our left a little river rushed impetuously over



## From Resht to Teheran

the yellow sand of its bed, and from everywhere in the forest the sound of murmuring, rushing waters came softly out to us.

It should be mentioned here that at every post-ing-house we lost half an hour or an hour's time. We also drank a considerable quantity of the *stakan tchai* (tea), poured out for us from a teapot kept hot perpetually on glowing charcoal stoves.

During the evening we passed out of the forest and skirted a stretch of rocks. Finally we crossed the big river and came to a standstill in front of a bar of wood, placed across the road. We had reached the *zastava*, or toll-house of Mendjil, where, thanks to the courtesy of the Resht consul, we were to sleep the night. It was then half-past ten, and we had been driving without ceasing for twelve hours.

At the *zastava* our host proved to be an intelligent and good-natured Jew. His son, who also waited on us, had only a few months ago returned from the gymnasium at Rostov-sur-Don, which, with the rest of the educational establishments in Russia, had suddenly been closed by order of the Government.

In a very short time the samovar was singing softly at one end of the table, while an excellent dish of pilaff was being served up for us. We also unstrapped our luncheon baskets and got out certain additions, which we shared comfortably with our

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

hosts, while the wind, sweeping through the defile outside, howled like a tempest.

Bibesco talked German to them, and, supper over, they offered us their room for the night. Till twelve one of the watchmen attended at the barrier, to take toll from the passing caravans, but from then till morning it was the duty of the toll-house keeper himself.

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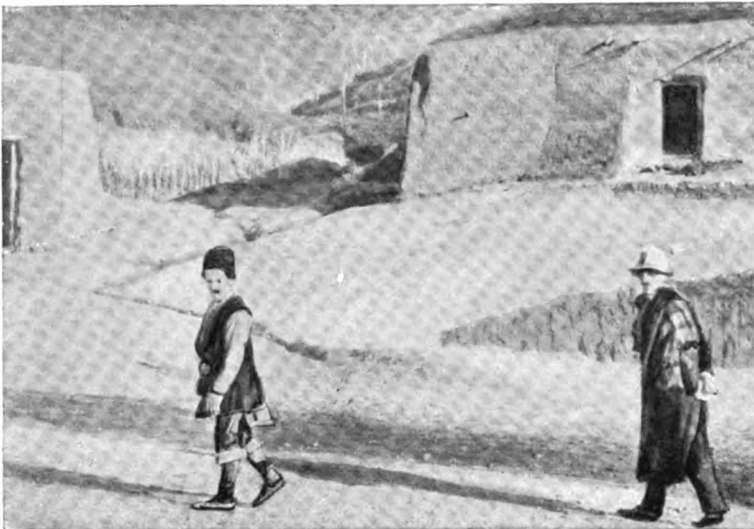
After a sleepless night—spent in hunting first for bugs and then for a noisy mouse—we started at dawn once more upon our travels. It was a Thursday (the 11th of May), and as we left the *zastava* daylight was slowly breaking behind the hills. An icy, furious wind beat down from the plain above and swept the narrow defile we were in. But once out of the latter we passed into scenery wholly different from that of the day before. Yesterday our way had been through dense woods, waters, and flowers. To-day not a tree, not a plant—nothing but rocks and stones interminably.

We saw certainly a few fields of blue-looking rye, and of oats that seemed to shiver in the morning breeze. These were close to the river, where there were also some tremulous poplars, so intensely and startlingly green in the raw light of dawn that one seemed never to have seen anything like them before. But above the great valley were only arid mountains, extinct craters, covered with lava, and menacing-looking summits—a whole world of dead



PASSING THE CARCASS OF A CAMEL, OUTSIDE RESHT  
OUR CARRIAGE IN THE DITCH

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PERSIAN HOUSES IN THE MOUNTAINS BETWEEN  
MENDJIL AND KASVIN

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## From Resht to Teheran

volcanoes, implacable and tortured-looking, but whose strata were so marked that one could see miles off the nature of their origin. Great walls of dark red rock, like porphyry, gave an added effect of tragedy to the scene. Here and there streaks of vivid-looking sulphur had crystallized on the summit or on flanks of some individual height. As the carriage climbed slowly up the winding mountainous road not a cloud was to be seen, and the extraordinary dryness of the air had an electric quality—one's hair crackled when brushed. Suddenly the sun beat down upon us with an awful intensity. In less than half an hour we had to throw off coats, waistcoats, and sweaters, and drive in our shirts, only huddled together under a sunshade, wholly inadequate to protect us from the glare.

After some hours of this we became torpid and dozed at intervals. So dazed, in fact, did the sun make us, that when once the horses dragged the carriage off the beaten track and brought us perilously near to the edge of a precipice, we were barely roused by the incident.

At each halt—and our horses were changed every two hours—we drank three or four cups of the weak tea that was always ready on the charcoal braziers. We also ate some of the hard-boiled eggs that were everywhere offered to us.

Towards five in the evening, when we were still nearly a hundred miles from Teheran, the country once more altered. The valley widened, we drew

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

away from the principal chain of mountains rising on our left, and the slopes of the hills grew less steep. Once more we came upon fields of rye and oats, shimmering in the incommunicably pure and crystalline atmosphere. At last we came to a culminating point of the road. We were then at a height of almost five thousand feet above the sea-level, and had reached the long-desired plateau of Iran. To the left, separating it from Russian Turkestan, is an enormous chain of mountains. The Elburz only ends to be continued by the Himalaya. Its white summits, beautiful in the setting sun, seemed to soar to heaven. In the distance shone the conical peak of Demavend, the sacred mountain whose crater slumbers, as it were, beneath eternal snows. At the foot of Demavend lay Teheran, while in front of us the road led down into Kasvin. To the right was the Persian plateau, crossed from east to west by mountains of no considerable height. It stretched, a monotonous desert, in the blue and grey lights that bathed it. But it was the ancient Persian empire, sprung at last before the eyes that had longed for it so ardently. We ceased to loll back in the carriage—we were tired no longer.

Night, which falls quickly in the East, overtook us on the road. It was ten o'clock before we reached the big town of Kasvin, an ancient centre of culture, where "Gouret-oul-Ayn" (the consolation of the eyes) was born, whose ardent life and

## From Resht to Teheran

tragic death in the Babists troubles is told by Gobineau.\*

We were to pass the night in the *chapar khaneh*, or hostelry—a house unique of its kind in Persia. There were rooms, beds, while at any hour food could be had at moderate prices. We enjoyed some chicken done with rice for eighty centimes. Such a thing, coming as it did after the hotels and prices of the Caucasus, was absolutely unforgettable. Outside, with its columned peristyle and enclosed garden, it looked like a palace. But for that matter the simplest buildings in Persia take, upon the smallest provocation, a monumental appearance.

Kasvin itself, the night we arrived, was in a state of extraordinary excitement. The Shah, who had left Teheran a fortnight ago for a journey to Europe, was to make, with all his Court, a formal entrance into Kasvin next morning.

We found a room reserved for us, and having set up our camp-beds and taken the strictest precautions against the nocturnal visitors, which in Persia are far more to be dreaded than the brigands themselves, we went sound asleep until six o'clock next morning, when the noise outside woke us up again. We went out into the garden, in front of which stands the old avenue leading to the governor's palace. To the left, under the shade of a young

\* For the history of the Báb, and the religious reform he tried to inaugurate during the nineteenth century, read Gobineau in "*Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l'Asie centrale*."

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

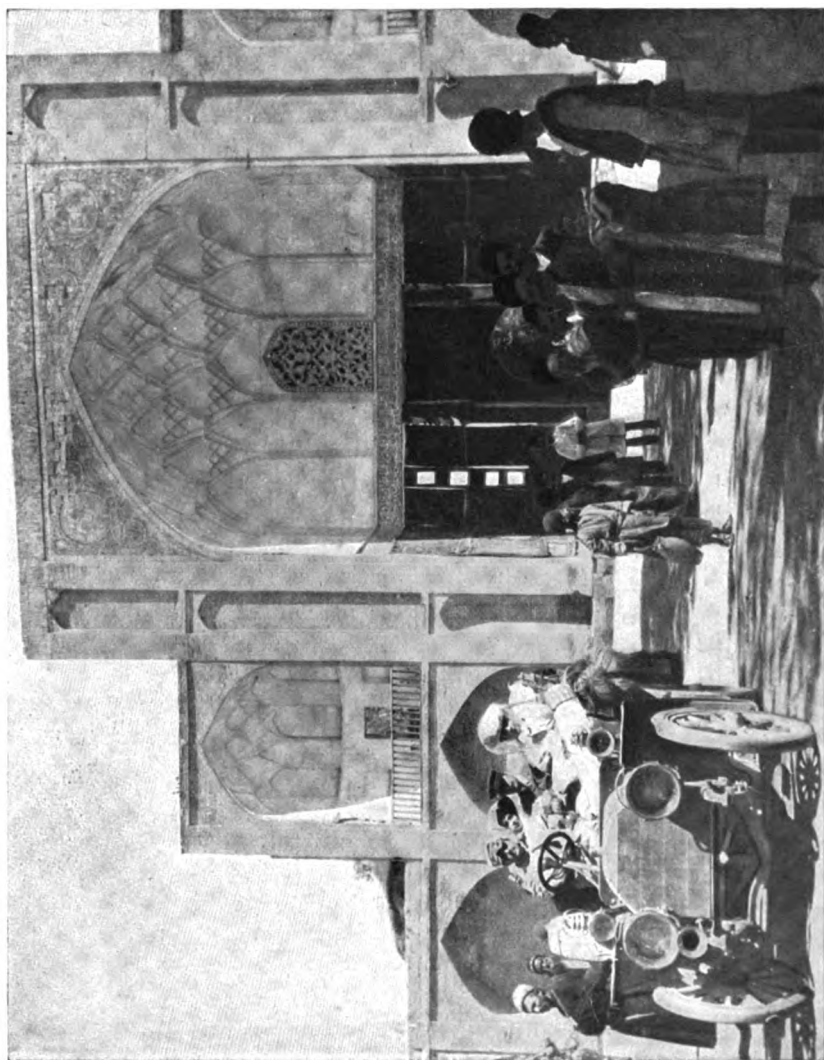
elm, was the entrance to a big mosque. Under the arch of the doorway, which was made of enamelled tiles, we caught a glimpse of the chief inner court, with its shallow tank for ablutions, and its enormous trees. The morning's procession was to pass through the court of the *chapar khaneh*, skirt the garden, and then proceed along the avenue to the governor's palace. We settled ourselves on the roof of a summer-house, close to the gates of the court, and watched the growing animation outside. Groups of men, dressed in flowing gowns, either of brown or blue, and wearing the usual Persian felt fez, were collecting here and there along the road. The priests, of which Kasvin is full, could be distinguished from the rest by their white turbans, while the *seyids* wore a green sash round their waists and a green turban on their heads. These latter proclaim themselves directly descended from the Prophet. The women, enveloped in great black veils, came in little parties. Their faces were hidden behind a thin white covering, through which, however, they were able to see without being seen.

The crowd was tranquil, dignified, patient ; there was neither noise nor hustling. Little pieces of ice were being sold for *deux centimes* a piece, and pipe bowls and dried fruits were also being offered.

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Presently the dusty road of the avenue was watered with water drawn from the ditch running





AT KASVIN. THE MOTOR-CAR OUTSIDE THE GATE OF THE GOVERNOR'S PALACE.

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## From Resht to Teheran

on either side of it, where in Europe one would expect to find a footpath. On the roofs of the low houses were numbers of women and children.

From seven o'clock long files of camels began to arrive from the royal camp, situated about twelve miles away. The drivers shouted incessantly to the people to get out of the road, the camel bells clinked, and the animals, tied one to the other in strings of six, came on with necks stretched out as if in supplication. They were always to me, these curious beasts of the desert, singularly interesting, and I could never see them without absorption. These of the Shah carried tents, piles of carpets, and sacks of corn and barley. Hundreds of mules followed, then wagons full of luggage, the trunks being some of them of European make and some of Persian, the latter always painted in vivid masses of colour. Behind them came the servants of the royal household in scarlet-and-gold liveries, soldiers in baggy uniforms, the royal post officials, with the silver lion worked upon high astrakhan caps, and then still more mules and camels. At least fifteen hundred of each of these two beasts of burden, carrying the oddest conceivable assortment of luggage, must have passed before us. I saw a dromedary with a wheeled chair on its back, a mule staggering under a colossal musical box, another with a gramophone, another with an ordinary school globe.

Finally, on a diminutive donkey, came a little man with a grey beard and spectacles, who carried

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

an enormous wallet, out of which bulged mysterious-looking articles, among others an enormous open telescope. This was his sacred Majesty's astrologer.

To add to the picturesqueness of the scene all the chiefs of the mountain tribes, and the heads of the big neighbouring villages, had collected to pay homage to the Shah on his journey. They were mounted on magnificently caparisoned little horses, and carried a carbine slung across their shoulders. The Shah, to whom we owed this interesting occasion, travels to-day almost exactly as Xerxes or Darius travelled in bygone ages. If he starts upon a journey nearly five thousand people go with him. Neither his ministers, nor any of his officials, or members of the Court he is in the habit of seeing daily, can stay behind in the capital. Only the harem remains, as no Persian woman travels to foreign countries. Each of these accompanying dignitaries brings at least twenty servants in personal attendance upon him. They have all two tents also, one being always sent ahead for the next night's camping. Then there are horses, and as many grooms as horses, camels, mules, furniture, carpets—one of the most indispensable luxuries of all to a Persian—trunks, and provisions. Finally a thousand soldiers watch over the safety of the Shah himself.

In this case progress through the desert was slow, his Majesty disliking to travel more than twelve miles a day. Moreover, his Majesty never went



THE ROYAL AVENUE AT KASVIN. THE GOVERNOR ON HIS WAY  
TO MEET THE SHAH

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A THREE HOURS' PROCESSION OF HIS MAJESTY'S LUGGAGE

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## From Resht to Teheran

anywhere by boat, unless it was absolutely unavoidable. A fortune-teller had once predicted death by water, and from that day the Shah avoided not only the sea, but even the smallest little rivulet. To escape the Murdab he was now going across a sandy road, just made for him, and which, by the most indirect means possible, would finally bring him to Enzeli.

Happily on the Russian frontier all but the fifty members of his suite were finally to be discarded. But this army of courtiers and servants that accompanies him during the first part of his journey is much dreaded by the people of the country through which they pass. The royal servants, by the by, though they wear the most brilliant of liveries, very seldom receive any wages. The honour of wearing the royal colours is considered sufficient satisfaction for them. It is a question for themselves how much they can make out of the business, with the result that the inhabitants of towns and villages flee at the very sight of them, and even the camel-drivers will turn their animals off the road sooner than be seen by them.

Suddenly, as the procession proceeded, a deliciously comic and modern note was struck in it by the Shah's motor-car, for the Shah had a motor-car and two French chauffeurs.

What use was an automobile to him ?

Nothing could be more satisfactory than to see "The Pole of the Universe" adopt the newest and

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

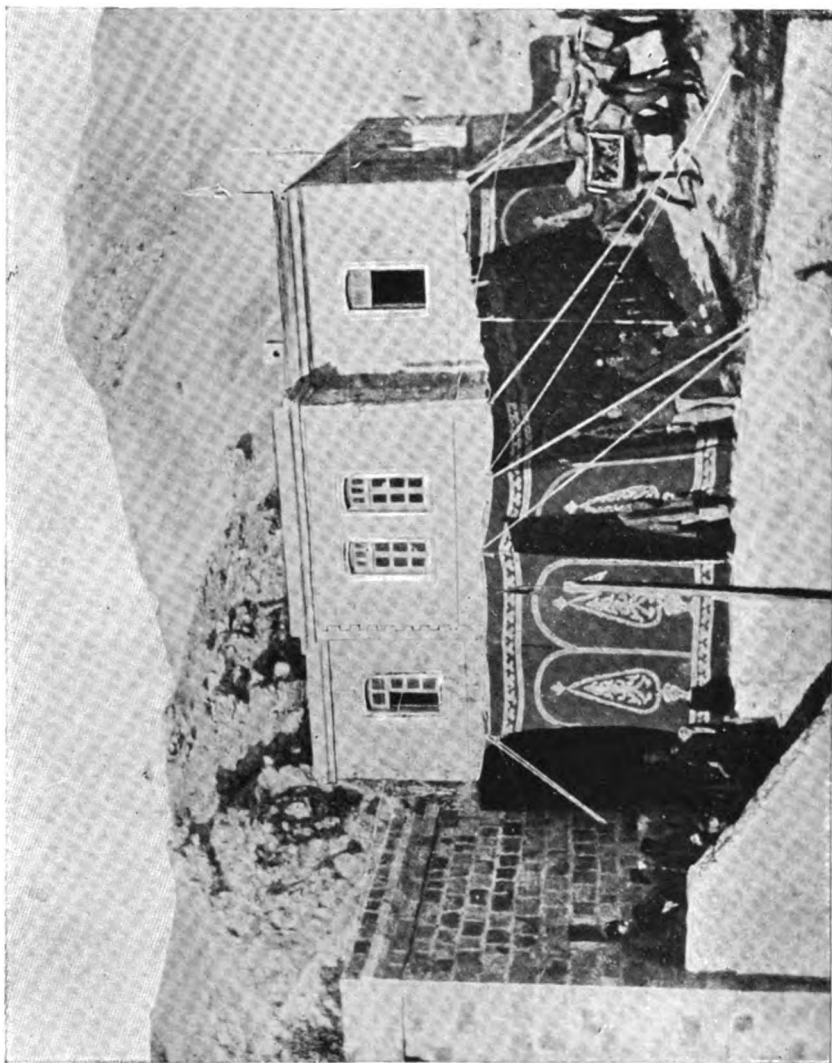
most rapid means of travelling, and starting from Teheran do in one day the distance which separates the capital from the Caspian Sea. It would be fine for his Majesty to be the "fastest" man in his dominions. One can imagine the legends that so credulous a people would weave about a sovereign with the extraordinary capacity of being at Teheran in the morning and at Resht by nightfall.

The Shah did not understand this. Moreover, he suffered from an affection of the kidneys, and merely used it much as other people would have used an invalid's wheeled chair. Occasionally he pottered about with it in his garden, but when using it on a journey it was never allowed to go quicker than the soldiers marching on either side of it.

At ten o'clock a cannon was fired—the Shah had crossed the gates of the city; shortly afterwards appeared a little crowd of men, some on foot and some on horseback, carrying long sticks. They were his Majesty's *ferrashes*,\* whose business was to keep the crowd back on either side of the road. This was easy enough, nobody showing more than a very mild interest in the proceedings. Then came a procession of people in the brilliant royal livery, headed by a drum-major, who flourished his baton with extreme awkwardness. Then came a trumpeter on horseback, then some Persian Cossacks led by a general who was literally as red as a lobster,

\* These fulfil the duties both of policemen and lackeys.—*Trans.*





THE ZASTAVA IN WHICH THE SHAH SLEPT

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and finally, in a closed carriage drawn by six horses, the "king of kings."

He was dressed in the ordinary European manner, and was leaning sideways, looking utterly weary, and as much like a tired provincial solicitor as anything I could think of. As he passed cannons roared, but the crowd itself remained absolutely silent. It seems that this indifference is usual and universal. Persians have never known an enthusiastic loyalty to the Shahs who for more than twenty-five centuries have occupied the throne above them.

. . . . .

By noon, though the heat was at its worst, we were once more on the road from Kasvin to Teheran, passing as we went the Shah's rearguard, and endless files of mules and camels. The scenery—one long stretch of desert, extending from Kasvin to our destination—was terribly monotonous. Not a wood, not a tree even, but as far as the eye could see wastes of stones and sand scorching beneath the burning sunlight. About every sixteen miles we changed horses, being lucky enough, in spite of the Shah, to find some ready. True, the poor beasts were all dead beat, and our progress in consequence continued extremely languid. Still we hoped to cover the ninety odd miles separating us from Teheran without another night's stoppage, even though we should not reach it until dawn next day. The heat and the glare tired us tremendously, and we vainly

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promised our coachman enormous tips (for we knew enough Persian already to make it understood that if he went quickly there would be a tip, and if not a beating) to get us to Teheran swiftly. In spite of all persuasions we never did more than six miles an hour.

At each posting-house we got out to stretch our legs. At Kischlag, where some small elms by the side of the house shivered in the evening air, there was also a small tank sunk into the ground. By it a man was praying. His clothes were in rags, his body lousy and emaciated. The sufferings of a life-time's hardships were stamped upon his features, and it was very obvious that he owned nothing but his own person. Nevertheless, with face turned towards the south and Mecca, he made his many genuflexions, and opened piteous hands to thank the Deity who had left him destitute. He kissed the earth, and confessed the greatness of the one God, and of Mahomet His prophet.

Night fell as we drove. To keep up our strength we ate, at each change of horses, some hard-boiled eggs, and drank some pale-coloured tea. Ahead, apparently, was a big river which we had to ford, as one of the arches of the bridge had been suddenly carried away. When we came to it the coachman refused to cross at night-time. Uselessly Bibesco offered the postmaster, who understood Russian, an enormous sum if we did ; no coachman could be got who would make the attempt. They all swore

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that it was impossible—that the current would sweep us away in its wake.

Thoroughly out of temper, we were obliged to haul down our luggage and face another dubious night's rest in a *chapar khaneh*. The house itself was of considerable size. We passed under a deep archway, where a group of coachmen sat round a charcoal brazier. From there we were led through a garden which the house practically surrounded, climbed up a steep staircase, and reached a gallery bathed in silver moonlight. Finally we were shown into a little room with whitewashed walls and a tiled floor that seemed of an immaculate cleanliness. There were, which was also unusual, two iron bedsteads with mattresses, as well as a table and two chairs. Dead tired, we asked for a *samovar*, made up our camp-beds, and got out some provisions. It was very damp, and we supposed that we must be near some pool of stagnant water. It was past midnight before, wrapped in rugs, we tried to go to sleep. But the cold was so intense that, in spite of our rugs and coats, we shivered, added to which the croaking of frogs beneath us was almost maddening. They seemed to sing both chorally and in solos ; never have I heard utterances so clear and so loud. At last I understood why the lords of ancient times used to order their serfs to beat the moats round their castles with sticks all night, so as to keep the frogs from disturbing them. Previously I had always taken this precaution as a pure abuse of

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power, an exhibition of selfishness, a Neroic desire to have others awake while enjoying sleep oneself. Now I knew that no measures could be too stringent which would put an end to the chanting of frogs to the moon.

Nevertheless, worn out, we ended by sleeping in spite of them. But we had not dropped off for half an hour before we were roused again by a noise in the room, and found the postmaster come to explain something to us in Persian. Disgusted, we drove him out, and fell asleep again immediately. An hour later back he came once more, and by the use of many gestures and much brandishing of the primitive lantern he carried, made us understand at last that we must start again immediately, in order to be at the ford by daybreak, as the water rises with the sun, and should we be late we should have to wait another twenty-four hours before crossing.

We rose, chilled to the bone. The damp was so great that the walls of our room were covered with a film of water. Shivering, we gloomily made ourselves a cup of boiling tea, then, having done up our beds and baggages, we went down the steep steps from the balcony and entered the waiting carriage. The horses, however, were not yet harnessed, and in the end, having risen before dawn, and having denied ourselves a proper night's rest, we were kept waiting until six o'clock before at last everything was ready for starting.

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After some miles' drive we reached the fording place, and found that the river did truly run with considerable force and swiftness between the uneven banks on either side of it. Owing to the Shah's recent passage a wooden bridge had been flung across for foot passengers, but for carriages there was still nothing save a cutting made down the banks to the river. Here extra horses were added, the coachmen shouted and cracked their whips, and with much noise and splashing of water our carriage crossed to the further side, while we stood and watched it from the little foot-bridge above.

All that day we drove slowly through monotonous scenery—to the left the mountains, to the right the desert. We grew stupid with the heat. All the breeze there was blew from the west, and as we were going to the east we only got it when at the posting-houses. About every hour we passed either a caravanserai, or a village, or a posting-house. Here Persians, lying upon mats in the shade, and drinking either tea or *arak*, and with a Turkish pipe by their sides, gazed at us without moving. It was the time of day when every native, torpid with heat, indulges in a tranquil siesta.

Towards one o'clock we stopped to eat some new-laid eggs. We sat during our meal under a doorway facing a little garden beautiful with irises. In front of us rose the snowy peaks of Demavend, at whose feet lay our destination—the town of

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Teheran. We left our fragrant resting-place somewhat reluctantly, but shortly afterwards a line of trees was pointed out to us, and we knew that we drew near the town we were making for. In Europe one recognizes a city by the distant vision of buildings and houses. In Asia, on the contrary, the trees being high and the houses low, one is aware of the proximity of a town by a sudden burst of verdure. We reached the gates slowly enough, the road being encumbered by soldiers returning from the Shah's last camping-place. The dust made one's eyes ache, and we were, moreover, so apathetic with heat that we took very little interest, at this stage of our journey, in anything.

The gates of Teheran were, however, picturesque enough, though covered in modern enamel tiles of no value whatever. Once through them we drove along wide but deserted streets, bordered by straight walls, without so much as a window showing. Depression seized us. Was this all we had come so far to see? Matters grew worse every minute, for presently we came to some shops—all of them European. From one we learnt that M. Bedrossian would make suits in the European style on the ready-money system, and from another that M. Elijan extracted teeth according to American methods. Bibesco had succumbed to the deepest melancholy, when fortunately we reached the hotel, an English house owned by a Mrs. Ritz, and inevitably known, therefore, as the Hotel Ritz. Here we drove into an



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exquisite little inner courtyard, round which the rooms opened, and which was filled with trees and flowering, scented roses. There were beds, servants, and hot water to be had on the establishment, the value of which things was already becoming abundantly clear to us.

After a bath I took a carriage in order to call at the French Legation. Suddenly, as I drove, I realized with some disquietude that I had forgotten my friend's name, or rather, as in a dream, it seemed to me that he had become another friend of mine instead of Bibesco. I had no recollection of his having travelled with me, and I found it strange and yet natural that he should be here at Teheran. On the whole I felt thankful my own name had not escaped me, as the fact might have rendered it extremely difficult for me to obtain the letters I expected. Such, however, are the effects of the burning heat of the sun on the brains of two people reckless enough to travel by day during the month of May in an open carriage across the desert of Persia.

## CHAPTER VI

### EIGHT DAYS AT TEHERAN

I OPENED my eyes next morning to the sound of a drum and some distant military music. Beyond the open window I could see the pillars of some doorway, and some bright green trees that seemed to flutter beneath a sky so intensely and burningly blue that it resembled a piece of enamel. I was still dazed with fatigue, and still uncertain who I was in Persia with ; but at the same time so voluptuously comfortable after a few hours' sleep, and the present respite from the miseries of the road, with its broken rests at the *chapar khanehs*, that I lay and gazed at the curtains of my room—blowing towards me with the breeze outside—in a perfectly exquisite and vacant detachment of mind.

“Happiness lies in living at one's ease.” Certainly we had earned this form of happiness, and for the time being we meant to enjoy it to the full. As for Bibesco, disillusioned by the suburbs, he declined for the present to have anything further to do with Teheran. The place, he declared, was a flagrant imposture. So he stuck to the hotel, made friends with the Englishmen at the Bank and

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telegraph offices, spoke English the whole day long, and refused to see anything. As for Ispahan, he declined so much as to have it mentioned. All he knew about Persia was the intolerable hardships to be endured in journeying through it, and this, he remarked, was more than sufficient for him. His one argument became a captious reiteration of the statement that the briefer the folly the smaller the fool. With me, on the other hand, exhaustion had taken the form of a sort of intoxication, in which I was acutely conscious of the joy of each minute as it passed.

The mornings were exquisite, and I spent them motionless under the portico outside my room. At seven I clapped my hands, and the Persian servant, Mahmud, would bring my bath-water. Then, barefooted and still in pyjamas, I would breakfast and wait for the shopkeepers with their goods. In front of me was the tiny garden, all green bushes and crimson roses, under a sky of changeless blue. The air was fresh, dry, electric, and possessing a quality wholly indescribable, but exquisite to feel. By eight o'clock the sellers of antiquities, or *dellals*, would begin to arrive, and, leaving their donkeys at the door of the hotel, would bring their brilliant coloured chests to my veranda. Their contents were motley enough. Out would come chased copper cups, enamels, vases, china ware of every sort, guns and daggers. Nine out of every ten of these things were modern, vulgar, valueless, though

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occasionally one chanced upon an enamel which showed a very fair imitation of the iridescent lustre which constitutes the value of the old Persian pottery, now almost impossible to get even in the country itself, and whose price is just as high there as in Paris. The tenth thing perhaps was old—not very old, belonging probably to the eighteenth or perhaps the seventeenth century. But even that sufficed to make it charming, the Persians having always possessed the most sumptuous and at the same time subtle sense of plastic art ; even in their decadence showing a surety and courage of treatment that are absolutely unequalled.

I asked the man to get me some of the *reflets métalliques* \* of the Mongol period—those done on a cream or white background. If these were impossible to find, I would be satisfied, I said, with those of a blue background, belonging to the time of Shah Abbas in the sixteenth century. He brought them next morning, carefully packed in a box, which he opened with almost exaggerated precaution. I trembled with excitement when he ended by carefully drawing out something wrapped in cotton-wool. He removed the cotton-wool—and showed me a piece of valueless imitation. For this he asked four hundred francs, an enormous sum at Teheran, while I offered—a franc. At this he laughed and remarked, “ Ah, monsieur knows

\* A species of Persian pottery with iridescent lustre, highly prized by collectors.—*Trans.*

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what he is about." But he was good-natured enough not to feel the least resentment, and next day came again with another piece as little genuine as the other. One day, however, an old trader offered me a rather beautiful vase. I examined it closely, noting the creamy groundwork, the value of the iridescent lustre, the accuracy with which the different colours were laid on. He asked 240 francs for it, and unfortunately that disquieted me. If he knew it as a genuine piece he would have asked at least treble that sum. I asked him, therefore, to let me keep it for a day or two, and took it in the interval to a connoisseur. But he could give no decided opinion, and advised me to buy it if I could get it for 160 francs. When the man returned I told him consequently, straight out, it was a fake. "*Nist antic!*" (not old) I declared sternly. Upon which, without attempting to prove its authenticity, he fled, and I never saw him again.

What one can get easily in Persia are pots and bowls of blue design, but without any lustre, that are 150 or even 200 years old. I bought some, after arduous bargaining, for one or two *tomans* each. Bibesco also discovered a kind of white china set in copper, that was very exquisite in quality. Old stuffs one could get in abundance and of enchanting loveliness. It was a joy merely to touch some of these old cashmeres, with their wonderful pattern of flowers, these delicately tinted waistcoats, these women's jackets with their bold

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brocading. One of the favourite designs constantly recurring in the old silks consisted of a parrot perched upon a branch of foliage. Even on women's bodices it was to be seen, either embroidered or inwoven into the material itself. There were also a number of little carpets, some of them of silk threaded with silver ; others of velvet, with the iridescent palm pattern peculiar to Persia ; others again of faded brocade ; but all of them so mounted that one side was as lovely as the other. One of the finest pieces of all, indeed, consisted of a seventeenth-century piece of Genoese brocade, with little palms on a background of dull gold, and bound in the Persian style with a narrow band of crimson silk. Hours went by while we sat in the shade of the portico, regardless of the fact that the sun was getting high in the heavens, and that the heat was rapidly intensifying.

. . . . .

In the afternoon we would go out, often with no other aim in view save to stroll aimlessly about and enjoy the sheer novelty of the scene, the sheer charm and profundity of the East. Personally I took an intense pleasure in the things that most people barely notice. To see the palaces and gardens is a duty no tourist is likely to omit. But what held me at the time was the multitudinous variety of people, the crowd among which we mixed, not to mention the camels and asses which were always passing along the streets.

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The camels, from beginning to end, never ceased to interest me. As they walk they have a way of looking at one as though suffering from short-sightedness, which is equally imposing and disdainful. When a camel eats, moreover, moving its jaw from left to right and from right to left, it seems to be saying all the time, "I shan't touch a morsel"; nevertheless it takes care not to leave so much as a fragment. Even on its knees it is haughty, while when lying down it is like nothing so much as an ostrich sitting on its eggs.

But it was its walk—slow, laborious, inimitable—that entranced me. I adored, too, its languid jerk of the head, as of one who in the course of travels has seen many things, if it were not too tiring and too futile to relate them. Again, I admired its superior and indifferent gaze, and the way its hair grew in a tuft on its head and in a goat's beard on its chin. The camel, too, laughs by disclosing a row of immense and yellow teeth. Many people take this for a sign of suffering, but as a matter of fact it is purely ironical. The camel merely expresses by it a contemptuous laughter, and an intention usually to do no more work that day. Again, with an infinitude of art and patience, it has practised its method of walking until it has attained a stride absolutely unbearable to everybody. In the East not even the camel-drivers are foolish enough to try and ride their animals. They ride on donkeys, while their camels, striding behind, lift

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a contemptuous upper lip in silent satisfaction. By Europeans camels are looked upon as essentially animals for hot countries, but as a matter of fact they bear heat very badly. No animal, indeed, is more nocturnal than the camel. It will travel only by night, and the moment the sun rises it squats down and goes to sleep. Unfortunately it smells abominably, which, as it is somewhat large in size, is distinctly awkward.

But I also loved the little grey donkeys, with their humble ways and soft pacific eyes. As a rule their nostrils are split when they are young so as to facilitate their breathing. They wear no bits or bridles, but a little fringe across the forehead of plaited leather, in which is mingled, with a delightful effect, a certain number of coloured glass beads. But the donkey is wholly simple-minded ; no one has less idea of how to organize existence. If you drove upon him in a carriage he would be run over sooner than jump aside to let you pass. To escape him you must literally push the creature out of the way, like some inanimate obstruction. These little donkeys, however, can carry heavy men without discomfort, and it is really quite a charming sight to see a fat, dignified Persian riding his favourite animal. The donkey's back is so broad that the rider's thighs remain horizontal, and only the shins and the feet, in their pretty Persian slippers, hang over each side. Persians either sit over the necks of



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their donkeys, or right back on the hind quarters, never on the small of the back like a European. Nevertheless, though the fat and bulky Persian looks as if inevitably about to crush the poor little beast staggering beneath him, the latter gallops courageously on, doing his best to shake up the liver of his turbaned rider.

But the donkey in the East is a friendly creature, and recognized as such. Children in Persian schools, who are unable to read their Koran correctly, are not called derisively by the name of the little patient beast, so familiar to them, as is the case with ignoramuses in other countries. Once in the desert I saw a donkey carrying a veiled woman with a sleeping child in her arms. At the side a man was walking, stick in hand. The donkey was stepping over the endless sand with little dainty, careful steps, as if cautious to avoid the stones and so not shake his precious burdens. He carried his head without ostentation, and yet with a certain gentility, as if perfectly aware that he was repeating for us a perfect representation of the Flight into Egypt.

. . . . .

Along with their animals I also, naturally enough, studied the Persians themselves. It was easy to see that they were composed of many different races. There were some like Hindoos, others like Mongols, others Turks. The true Persians (at least, according to my ideas, for I have no other sources of informa-

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tion) were tall and well set-up. Their faces were oval in outline, with regular features and round foreheads. The eyes were almond-shaped and fine, the neck long, and they all walked magnificently. Save for the Europeanized Persian, who wears a baggy frock-coat, their dress has never altered. The *seyids*, or descendants of the Prophet, wear robes, sashes, and turbans of green. The rest usually have brown woollen or pale blue robes, and either one or other of the two types of national headgear. The *mullahs* alone wear a white turban.

. . . . .

I watched them walking, talking, buying, and selling. None of them expressed any haughtiness, any love of ostentation. In Europe half the people in a crowd yearn to be taken for something they are not, but the Persian appears to have no snobbishness of this sort at all. He gives himself no airs whatsoever. I believe that equality in Persia is a more real sentiment than with us. Nothing, either in dress or manner of life out of doors at any rate, distinguishes the plebeian from the gentleman. They all crowd together in the streets, talk and walk together. Their amusements are the same, while in Europe a rich man would be ashamed to mingle with the lower classes and share his amusements with them. In their trade relations they show both good-humour and naturalness. I could not understand a word said, but I could catch well

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enough the difference in tone between a Persian shopkeeper's manner to a rich customer, and that of an English snob, for instance, when addressing a lord or duke.

Do they work ? I am afraid very little. They dawdle about a good deal, in the bazaars, in the streets, in the squares, and under the shade of the plantain trees. Towards five o'clock they go out for little walks, as often as not, in couples, holding each other's thumbs like two children going to school. In the streets they are never seen with women, who go about by themselves. Towards evening they go into the gardens that surround the towns, and walk about under the trees, or sit and talk perhaps by the side of some small stream.

Count Gobineau, who lived at Teheran for fifty years, tells some charming stories about them, that one believes largely because they are so delightful. Patriotism, he says, is not one of their virtues. They were quite willing to see either Russians or English take possession of Teheran. But they are passionately fanatical. It is difficult for a European even to get near a mosque ; to enter one is certain death for him. Enlightened observers, moreover, say that the presence of a considerable European colony in Teheran, instead of lessening the hatred felt against strangers, has enormously increased it, and that Teheran is more violently fanatical now than it was fifty years ago. Be that as it may, they bear more peace in their faces than we Europeans

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can boast of. While I was walking or driving under a broiling sun, I used to see them lying on a mat in the shade of some portico, a *kelyan* (Turkish pipe) by their side, a cup of tea within reach. They used to look at me quietly wondering why I put myself to so much trouble, and why I had come so far from my own country just to look at theirs.

. . . . .

The women, naturally enough, were even more interesting to me than the men. For one saw them, and yet saw nothing. They are more strictly veiled than any other women in the East, for they wear a huge ugly black veil that envelops them from head to foot. It is not actually drawn across the face, but for all that Persian women do not even allow their eyes to be visible, covering them with a sort of open-worked white handkerchief.

Curiously enough, this veiled condition is not of religious origin. The Koran, which prescribes for everything, says nothing whatsoever about it. The fashion has arisen purely as a matter of good form, started by the aristocratic Persian women belonging to the Prophet and the Arab chiefs. And so they go about the streets, looking in their black-and-white garments like so many dominoes on their way to a masked ball. At first the constant sense of hidden charms was little less than an irritation. But gradually one grew to be actually thankful to the covering which gave them all a mysterious fascina-

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tion. For one realized that, in a country where women age with extraordinary rapidity and become very early lined and decrepit, most of these enigmatic figures were in reality anything but lovely or youthful.

Nevertheless I did see the faces of two of them. It was at Kasvin, the day of the Shah's entry. I was walking in the avenue when I passed two women behind the trunk of a huge plantain. Being alone they had unveiled in order to readjust their shapeless black garments. I just caught a glimpse of their brilliant almond-shaped eyes, their straight eyebrows, their clearly-cut noses, and their pale amber-coloured skins, before, having seen me, they leisurely re-covered their charming faces. These two, and they seemed to me sisters, were certainly beautiful, but, unlike the well-known traveller, who having seen one red-haired French woman declared that all French women were red-haired, I do not believe that all Persian women are exquisite. I think, in fact, that my two Galateas were so languid in the business of refastening their white handkerchiefs simply because they were quite aware that they were unusually good-looking.

Women in Persia appear to enjoy a considerable amount of liberty ; they go out when they like, and are often seen unaccompanied. The disguise offered by their outdoor equipment would seem to allow great facilities for intrigue and infidelity. But of this I know nothing, save the statement made on

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the subject by Herodotus, who says—"In the opinion of the people of Persia, to run off with another man's wife is an iniquity. At the same time to revenge it is foolishness. To the wise the carrying off of no woman is worth troubling about, since, had she not lent herself to it, she could never have been taken."

. . . . .

As regards old buildings, the tourist who goes to Teheran will be deeply disappointed. In addition, there is no Persian pottery worth seeing. Even tiles on the walls of the gates are examples of the worst possible kind of modern feeling, and as a matter of fact were made at Vienna. In the bazaar, it is true, one can pass time pleasantly enough. It is vaulted, and at the summit of the vaulting is a small space through which a feeble light trickles. In the bazaar it is cool, dusty, and strangely dark after the burning light outside. One wonders how the people can live and work as they do in such sombreness. Surely in the end it will produce a race of Persians with such delicacy of eyesight that broad daylight will be unbearable to them. For inside the bazaars there is a constant output of activity. At the back of the deep arcades one can see men squatting on their heels, hammering copper, carving upon gold and silver, cutting skins, making harness, caps, and the most delicate embroideries. In the same darkness veiled women will choose materials, while the camels, blinking as if still in

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broad sunlight, seize the opportunity deliberately to tread upon one's toes. In the bazaar there are also cooks preparing *pilaff*, *kebab*, and meat stews flavoured with fennel or onion, which they send out to their various customers. The whole place smells stale and unpleasant, if not actually reeking. However, as a rule only Persians haunt the bazaar. It is not considered good form for Europeans to be seen there, and by strolling about as we did we were not only violating the rules of etiquette, but lowering the prestige of our countrymen in Teheran.

. . . . .

The Hunting Palace of Hare Hill, a few miles away from Teheran, rises in terraces up a rocky hill. At the foot of the hill is the garden, consisting of a long walk of plantains and acacias, of great clumps of pink primroses planted in the lawn, two streams running one each side of the walk, and pools of water at every crossing in the paths. These pools are sheltered by cut trees so thick and bushy that I had some difficulty in identifying them as young elm trees. At the end of the different paths are little pavilions of enamelled tiles, better seen at a distance. Behind the pavilions is the Shah's menagerie. The rains during the spring had been considerable, and under an Eastern sun we found an English greenness. In a month everything would be burnt up, but we had arrived at the exact hour of this garden's youthful and precarious beauty.

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In it we found an old Guebre gardener. He was magnificent as well as huge. The kings carved on the stones of Persepolis have the same regular features, straight nose, large eyes, thick beard, and the dignity of bearing that we admire so much. The representative before us of the oldest Persian race was worthy of his ancestors.

Half-way up the flanks of a bare-looking hill stood the Zoroastrian tower, for there are still a few Fire-worshippers left among these Shiite Mussulmans. As prescribed by their religion, these Fire-worshippers expose their dead upon towers, so as not to soil by their contact earth, fire, or water. Birds peck them to pieces. The Guebre thus plays in nature the part assigned to God by the little Joas: "Aux petits des oiseaux il donne leur pâture." Like the pelican, to make sure that they are nourished, he offers his own person.

Evening came. A soft and at the same time clear light, blue in the distance and golden on the near hills whose dry ridges it sharply defined, bathed the landscape and caressed the stony sands of the plain, where a few patches of green, a few fields of oats or rye, seemed like little carpets spread out at our feet. Suddenly, almost without transition, night fell. In the west was a purple sunset, in the east Mars shone red in a sky already grown quite dark.

There is in Teheran an avenue of old trees. Open



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stalls line it on either side, and in front of these stalls Persians, sitting on low benches which act at one and the same time as table and chair, work in the open air.

At night, when we went for a stroll, we sometimes passed a narrow door opening into a brilliantly lit room. This room led into a garden with a number of shining lanterns hung in the trees. Here Persians sat drinking tea, *arak*, or acidulated drinks cooled by little lumps of broken ice. These illuminated gardens seemed like a glimpse of fairy-land, granted to us as we walked.

. . . . .

We had now been eight days without the rest of our party, though we had been expecting them daily. Had, we wondered, a strike broken out at Baku, or had some irreparable accident happened to the motor-car? While we were still waiting for news a telegram came for us. As it was written in Persian we handed it to Mahmud, who looked at it and said, "It is to say that four friends are coming to dinner."

At this we were delighted. But dinner-time came without any sign from our two married couples. However, we were not greatly surprised. George Bibesco had simply not reckoned with the awful torrent beds they had had to encounter, and which had evidently considerably delayed them. During the evening, nevertheless, some doubts shook us as

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to the correctness of Mahmud's translation, and we sent the telegram to a *mirza* (a man of letters) living in the neighbourhood. An hour later he returned us, with his compliments, the following stupefying translation : " Musketov Féringar.—Have crossed march, terrible difficulties, boat foundered, caravan returned, reach Resht by mountain, arrive Wednesday evening.—Léonore."

Nothing could be more incomprehensible. Neither of us, in the whole course of our existences, had ever known a lady of the name of Léonore, who loved us sufficiently to face such dangers to re-find us. Bibesco, who was fond of guessing riddles, finally took pencil, paper, and the telegram, and retired to his room to wrestle with the mystery. An hour later, congested but triumphant, he returned to me. He had deciphered its meaning. Musketov Féringar, unlikely as it seemed, meant us. The rest was easy enough. Léonore stood for our friend Léonida, who was taking the Erivan-Tabriz road. Evidently it was impassable, and he had taken a boat from Baku. This had gone down and he had reached Lenkoran (caravan was Lenkoran), and would arrive via Resht. As to the part about the mountains, it was best not referred to. Nothing could be more clear and comprehensible than the telegram without it.

I expressed myself satisfied with the explanation, and went on smoking. Next day, notwithstanding, I took the telegram to the French legation, where

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Monsieur Nicholas, who is thoroughly acquainted with the Persian language, once more translated the message for us. The first words now became our names—Bibesco, Phérékyde. Caravan became Erivan; march—Arax; boat sunk—axle broken; Resht—Tabriz. And the telegram read—"Crossed Arax after terrible difficulties, owing to broken axle, had to return to Erivan, reached Tabriz over the mountains, arrive Wednesday evening.—Léonida."

. . . . .

On the Wednesday specified it was not, after all, however, Léonida who joined us, but the two young couples. They had done a superbly swift piece of driving. The motor-car had not been landed at Enzeli until Tuesday morning, owing to a strike at Baku. They had started at four in the afternoon, taking the chauffeur Keller and the Tcherkess Hassan with them. There were consequently six of them in the car, crouched with their knees up to their chins, because, though reduced to one hand-bag each, there were still six camp-beds and their coverings to stuff into the car. Reaching the great plateau, they dined at Mendjil, and by eleven o'clock had reached Yusbachäi. Here the Shah was camping, and an English doctor in attendance upon his Majesty kindly lent them his tent for the night. They left again at eight o'clock next morning, lunched at Kasvin, and took, to get from Kasvin to Teheran, a little over five hours (we had taken

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twenty-four for the same journey), including the time wasted in crossing the river of the broken archway.

Once more we were all together. Naturally enough we sat up late under the portico of the house kindly placed at our disposal by the Government, and which was guarded by sunburnt, good-natured, and tattered soldiers. We spoke of our journey to Ispahan, and the enthusiasm of the two feminine members of the party spread even to the recalcitrant Emmanuel Bibesco. Before we left each other for the night it was decided that we should start on the following Sunday.

Meanwhile we continued to explore Teheran, and first of all we went to the ruins of Rhey, or Rhages, which, under the Seljuks, had been one of the most important towns of Asia, as it is one of the oldest. The Jews were exiled there in the time of the captivity; Haroun al-Raschid was born and stayed there, and during the eighth and twelfth centuries it reached a very high state of civilization. The few relics now to be found there, chiefly earthenware with the iridescent lustre, are of an incomparable quality. The town was pillaged by Genghiz Khan during the Mongol conquest in 1221, and again by Timour. It never recovered. The ruins are buried deep in the sand carried by the winds of the desert. Only a tower, reconstructed some years ago, remains. A magnificent sculpture of the Sassanian period was until

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recently still to be seen on a beautifully situated rock. It was stupidly destroyed in order to be replaced by a bas-relief of Fath-Ali Shah, the great-grandfather of the present Shah.

Nothing in truth is left of Rhages. But if any one cared to undertake serious explorations they would certainly unearth some priceless works of art. There are no difficulties to conquer, as Rhages is only a few minutes from Teheran. Money would be the principal requirement. Let us hope that the French Government, who has already done such good work at Persepolis, and is continuing it in Shushan, may one day explore the buried soil of slumbering Rhages.

. . . . .

We also visited the Shah's palace. So far travelers have always considered it necessary to speak respectfully of this palace, but personally I intend to be frank concerning it. And it is no good imagining, for instance, that the Shah, descendant of "the king of kings," lives sumptuously in one of the royal residences of the "Arabian Nights." He lives European fashion, and has the shocking taste to prefer articles made in Vienna at a franc to the beautiful things made in his own country.

The art of Persia has always been of an exquisite subtlety. In Europe and in America connoisseurs fight for possession of its miniatures, its *reflets métalliques*, its brass, and its carpets. But in the Shah's palace not one Persian work of art is to be

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found. In his much-boasted museum, kept under glass, are little French paper fans, still marked with the price—65 centimes. Next to them is a hand-glass marked 3 francs 45.

True, one can see the famous Peacock throne, but it never came from Delhi, and the Great Mogul never sat upon it. The thing was made in Ispahan at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and I am told that many of the precious stones originally set in it have since been replaced by others less valuable. Personally I much prefer to it the alabaster throne shown on the ground-floor, and which is a fine example of Hindoo workmanship. Finally, in the museum are some pieces of Sèvres and other china, which various European sovereigns have wisely rid themselves of at the cost of his Persian Majesty. The walls are covered in equally terrible pictures, which nothing can persuade me were gifts sent to the Shah by the various kings and emperors of Europe. In his private apartments the furniture again is covered in plush or velvet according to the worst period of Victorian furnishing. And musical boxes, pianolas, barrel-organs, harmoniums, musical chairs, and singing tables, choke up the place. The bedroom was full of them; but when I looked for a bed none was to be seen. "The Centre of the Universe," the "Staircase to Heaven," sleeps on two flat cushions laid upon a carpet.

Above the cushion for his head stands a whatnot, and on the whatnot, grouped round his own portrait,



THE SHAMSUL-IMARA PALACE AT TEHERAN

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are four photographs. In the middle stands the photograph of *Muzzafer-ed-Din*, and on the right and left Edward VII and his gracious consort Alexandra, while a little further away—less favoured—stand the Tsar and Tsarina. These sovereigns and their wives watch over his Majesty's rest, and it is sad to learn, therefore, that he suffers from troubled slumbers.

The gardens of the palace, called *Gulistan*, are, however, exquisite. Running waters flow over blue enamelled tiles. There are great pools the colour of jade, huge beds of wonderful irises and coloured lilies, tremulous plantains, and hedges and hedges of roses.

As the Shah was in Europe we were received in audience by the Vali-Ahd, the heir to the throne, Governor of Tabriz, and Regent during his father's absence. The question of dress had previously cost us considerable trouble. According to etiquette we ought to have worn top hats and frock-coats. The first, however, we had not got, and after some delay, his Highness, in consideration of the fact that, as all Persia knew, we had come in a motor-car, consented to waive the question of headgear. Nevertheless the hat point was a more important one than appeared at first sight, as in the Turko-manchai Treaty of 1827 it was decreed that no European should uncover in the presence of his sacred Majesty, who is never seen without an astrakhan fez.

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We were presented by the courteous Russian minister. According to oriental etiquette, we were first shown into a room where refreshments were served to us, presumably while we rested from the fatigue of our journey. Then we passed into an enormous apartment, where, in a corner opposite the door, Vali-Ahd was seated—who rose as we entered. He was a man of thirty-eight, I think, though he looked forty-five, stout, uncomfortable, and blinking short-sightedly behind gold spectacles.

A Russian interpreted, and after a brief and wholly pointless conversation the audience terminated. But one had to back out, and the six of us were obliged to traverse the immense room with our eyes fixed on Vali-Ahd, who stood with hand raised to his fez, while we knocked against chairs and tables and grew every minute more afraid of not being able to restrain the ridiculous laughter which is apt to seize one at such strained and awkward situations.

. . . . .

Later on, at the various legations, where we received the most charming hospitality, I tried to ascertain the present actual position of the Shah's empire, as well as the politics of the two great Powers who have strong interests in the affairs of Persia.

These two are Russia and England. But Persia, it must be remembered, is not a rich country. Three times as large as France, it possesses a population of eight millions only. Again, the Government is

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despotic, but, instead of doing everything it wants, its power is almost negligible, and it is only maintained for the excellent Persian reason that it has always been there. Their indifference to political questions is extreme. What would be the interest, they ask, in replacing the *Kajars*, the actual reigning family, by another? All the interest existent in this would be limited to the *Kajars* and those who supplanted them. As far as the people were concerned nothing would be altered.

Naturally, if absolute monarchy became tyrannical it would be hated, but this it cannot do, being checked by the priests or *mullahs*. Living in the midst of an ignorant population whose fanaticism they are careful to excite, these men are all-powerful. Even the smallest questions have to be referred to them, and it was only with their permission and after much discussion that the Shah was allowed to go for his trip to Europe in 1900. On the other hand, the merchant class possesses certain privileges and freedom, and is allowed to administer its own affairs. Should any friction arise, in fact, the *mullahs* would protect it even against the Government, being fully aware of the wisdom of keeping in with the community that has all the wealth in its hands. There remain, therefore, as taxable and workable at their lords' will and pleasure, only the peasants.

But the Government, on the other hand, has no real grip of the lower classes. If the taxes grow too

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heavy they refuse to pay them. Sending troops to enforce obedience is a difficult business. The soldiers, first of all, are not easy to get, and when got they must be willing to march to the place wanted. This, moreover, is a costly matter. Finally, in many districts, if life is made too hard for him the peasant cares very little about leaving his home. His wants are so humble that to build another elsewhere is no great matter for him, while there is no difficulty in finding a small spot of earth that will grow the little that suffices him.

With these facts another of my illusions vanished. I had discovered that it was a poor thing to be the despot of an oriental country. True, the Shah can have a few heads chopped off without much fuss being made about it, but that, after all, is no great matter. In reality he is a sovereign without power in a country without resources.

Yet Russia and England are both persuaded that under their benevolent tutelage these slender resources would wonderfully develop. In addition, owing to its geographical position, each of these two nations considers Persia as necessary to the safety and consolidation of its empire.

Russia's position is peculiarly strong, as it has a frontier on Persia of many hundreds of miles—from the Black Sea to Afghanistan. She presses in fact heavily upon her neighbour. Her railways, her roads, her steamers, all come to the very borders of Persia. She alone has access to the northern

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part of the country, and allows no goods destined for Persia to be sent through Russia. She has therefore commercially an immense advantage over her rivals, who can only hope to retaliate by the cheapness and superiority of their merchandise.

England, on the other hand, can only get goods into Persia via the Persian Gulf and the Seistan and Baluchistan. The rivalry, in addition, is by no means purely a commercial one. Russia is continually pushing southwards, hoping one day, perhaps, to have a share in the Persian Gulf, through possession of a seaport at Bushire. This England, of course, could not allow, for Russia would then have too near a foothold to India. If Bushire and the south of Persia should cease to be Persian, they must belong to England or nobody.

As far as the political struggle between Russia and England is concerned the former so far has decidedly the best of it. During the whole of the nineteenth century they steadily gained ground. In 1827 the Russian legation in Teheran were massacred by the natives. Russia retaliated by annexing provinces in the Caucasus. The Russian frontier to-day stretches as far as Arax, and on the Caspian Sea as far as Astara. Turcoman has been conquered and railways built there. Lastly, the Shah ended by borrowing money from his northern neighbours. The history of this loan is characteristic, and rankles no doubt in the breasts of many English imperialists.

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In 1900 the Shah turned to England for the loan of fifty million francs, of which he stood in urgent need. The English bankers refused it, unless payment would be guaranteed by the English Government. The latter, in its turn, demanded control of the Persian customs by English officials. This the Shah refused. At that point intervened Russia, stating that she would lend as much as ever Persia wanted. A great borrower herself, she was only too pleased for once to act as creditor. Between neighbours, also, services should be mutual. The offer once accepted, Russia only insisted on the insertion of two small clauses—one specifying that if the interest on the loan were not paid, she should take over the customs; the other, that the loan should not be repaid for ten years, during which time Persia should borrow no money elsewhere. Thus was England deprived of the influence borrowed money gives to the creditor.

It is Russia also who is opposed to all the splendid schemes inspired by English initiation, and but for that power Persia would now be connected north and south, east and west, by railways. For in 1900 Russia signed a secret convention with Persia, in which the latter government was debarred from granting concessions for any railway enterprise for a period of ten years, while at the end of that time the renewal of the convention was to become a matter to be newly discussed by the contracting parties.

There is, however, only one line in Persia which

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might prove a paying concern—that from Erivan to Teheran, via Tabriz and Kasvin. But Russia alone has the right at present to construct this line, and she, for well-defined reasons, is in no hurry to do so, the country having done excellently without them for twenty-five centuries, and the present means of transport being almost sufficient for her needs.

I thought when I got to Teheran I should find Russian prestige lowered by its disastrous war with Japan, and its own internal agitations. But when I mentioned this to a man intimately acquainted with contemporary feeling in Persia he laughed. Even enfeebled, he said, Russia was still too strong for Persia. Persia had no real power, and could offer no resistance to anything. All she could do was to play off Russia and England against each other, and even that was difficult for her. As for really offering any definite opposition to Russia, it would be impossible. Ten thousand Cossacks, concentrated at Erivan, would instantly take Tabriz, Teheran, and for that matter the whole of Persia. The bear's paw was on the country and she was not likely to take it off again. Persia might be thankful that for the moment she could not actually start hugging. To England, he added, Russia represented a lesser civilization ; but compared to Persia, Russia has attained a state of civilization greater than the former country will ever be able to arrive at.

At the present time English and Russian possessions in Persia are as follows : the English have

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"The Imperial Bank of Persia" at Teheran, with branches in all the principal towns. The Indo-European telegraph comes by way of Tabriz as far as Teheran, and is continued by the Indian telegraph through Ispahan, Shiraz, and Bushire. The English have in their favour the nearness of India, the superior quality and cheapness of their merchandise, and the energy of their merchants. In spite of the inferiority of their geographical position the annual business done by them amounts to more than one hundred million krans, which is almost equal to that of Russia. They have the finest legation at Teheran, and keep some splendid Bengal lancers at the consulates of Ispahan and Bushire. English influence dominates in the south, while Lord Curzon has already made naval demonstrations in the Persian Gulf. An English mission, to which some officers were attached, have already scoured the south of the country to study what is called in Europe "the needs of the market." A poor enough market, unfortunately. Finally, though more as a jest than anything, the English Consul at Bushire is called Viceroy of Bushire, owing to the fact that the Russian consul at Resht is actually known as Viceroy.

Russia, on the other hand, in addition to being a very close, powerful, and insistent neighbour, has in several of the large towns banks for loans and bill-discounting, which are offshoots of the State Bank in St. Petersburg. She has the high roads



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and exclusive commercial use of them, the telegraphs, the post offices, and even the telephone service from Enzeli to Teheran. A Russian colonel commands the only regiment of Persian Cossacks which have any military value. Russia, also, is on the best of terms with the Shah. She is Persia's creditor to the amount of sixty-five million francs—a small sum, it is true—but one she would like to see greatly augmented. She is accused of political inertia, but the whole keynote of Russia's foreign policy is patience, and the swiftness (to speak in contradictions) that goes slowly. She tried once to push matters in the far East, and learnt bitterly to rue the error. In Persia she has no intention of repeating the same mistaken eagerness.

But a third factor has to be reckoned with in Persia. While England and Russia were quarrelling a third thief stole in and carried off the bone of contention. Ten years ago Belgium was a cipher in Persia ; now she plays an important part in the development of the country. This occurred in the following manner.

Yet it must not be thought that the Persians lack intelligence—far from it. For a long time, for instance, the Government has realized that if it had honest employees the taxes would, as they are intended to do, pass into the royal treasury and ameliorate the affairs of the state. But having made this discovery it was characteristic of the nation to be content with its theoretic advantage

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and to make no attempt to put it into practice. The great essential was to live in peace. Two items of the administration, however—the post office and the customs—militated against this latter attainment. Both meant an almost daily contact with strangers, and these tiresome creatures, at the smallest irregularity, or the least little bit of swindling, were apt to rush off unpleasantly to their consuls or ambassadors.

In consequence, Persia's advisers begged her to put European officials at the posts and customs, while Russia and England both equally urged that they could supply the best kind of men needed.

But Persia was afraid. To give either a finger would be to have the whole hand gripped, and consequently she refused both. The vital point of the whole question was to obtain officials who would be in no sense dangerous. In the end she fixed on Belgians, helped in the decision by the advice of a singularly intelligent and enterprising Belgian, who had settled for many years at Teheran, and had made a fortune as a government servant. And for the last five years Belgians have controlled in the most satisfactory manner both the post office and the customs.

Our final days in Teheran were in the last degree cosmopolitan. We were so kindly received by the various legations, that we frequently lunched, as it were, in Russia, had tea with his English Royal

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Highness, dined with France, and ended by a dance at the Turkish Embassy. Fortunately our trunks had been gracious enough to rejoin us at Teheran, and, being able to get some petrol from the Banks of England and Russia, we were able to motor about the neighbourhood and see the beautiful gardens which surround the city. Ever since we had reached the Iran we had not seen a cloud in the sky. During the day it was one vast unalterable stretch of blue above our heads, while at night it became a violet-coloured dome studded with innumerable stars. This, and the wonderful clarity of the atmosphere, the fresh breezes of dawn and evening, and the quiet, monotonous life we led, so enervated us, that we felt, should we stay in Teheran much longer, we should never have the strength of mind to leave for Ispahan at all.

. . . . .  
Fortunately all of us pined to see the latter city, though, when we mentioned our decision, the whole foreign colony became stupefied. Go to Ispahan? Nobody ever heard of such a thing. They expatiated upon the weariness of the journey, the want of food, lodging, and the desert one would have to cross over. As for our two womenfolk, they could never stand the hardships entailed by it. We must be mad even to contemplate such an expedition.

But we had not come so far to stop a few days off from the very goal of our journey, or to remain in so Europeanized a town as Teheran. Until now

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we had thought that the people of Teheran probably frequently went for a week or two's holiday among the roses of Ispahan, and were surprised to learn that no members of the various Legations, except the English, ever attempted to cross the desert. At the same time this constituted no reason why we should follow their example. Consequently we commenced making preparations for our departure. This was no light business, for we knew that it was necessary to carry sufficient food for the six of us, nothing being procurable on the journey.

A servant also was a necessity. The Tcherkess Hassan, whom we had brought as far as Teheran, had amply proved that he knew no more Persian than he did French. We therefore sent him back to the Caucasus, and Monsieur D'Apchier found us a French protégé of his as combined servant and interpreter. Our new acquisition was eighteen, though he looked twelve, and had fled destitute to Teheran, of which he knew the smallest alley, and where he followed all sorts of trades and got into all sorts of troubles, from which the French Legation had to extricate him. He wore a ragged Persian coat over checked cotton trousers, also in rags; yellow boots, with gaping soles disclosing feet innocent of socks, and a tall black fez which was never off his head. He rarely washed, and had an accent and a raciness of expression which became a never-failing source of joy to us. He was cute, energetic, skilful—ready to put up with anything

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for the pleasure of travelling, and had already been twice to Ispahan. His name was Aimé, and he possessed light yellow eyes like a cock's. Everything he did he did well, and he ended by becoming so indispensable to us that his memory will remain inseparably associated with the remarkable journey we made from Teheran to Ispahan.

The question of carriages had next to be considered. We had but one motor-car, and there were seven of us, including Aimé. It was, besides, necessary to take all the food and baggage that we should need from day to day, not to speak of petrol. This being impossible, we decided to leave the large Mercédès behind us at Teheran, where Keller would have ample leisure thoroughly to overhaul and clean it.

We no sooner went to the posting-house, however, than we found that three landaus were not available, and moreover that from there to Kum only eight posting-horses could be had as relays. At this crisis the postmaster offered us what he called a brake, but at the sight of which a thrill as of death ran down the spine of even the most courageous among the party. For this brake was no more nor less than a big wooden box with a bench on either side about a foot wide—or less—and destitute of cushions or upholstery. It was covered by a sort of roof supported by four wobbly pieces of iron, while some torn fragments of linen hanging down the sides was our sole protection against the sun by day and the cold winds by night.

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Having gazed at the thing we shrank back horror-stricken. Never had we been so near renouncing all thoughts of Ispahan. But the postmaster assured us that we should find a comfortable diligence at Kum, and finally, ashamed of being held back solely by a question of comfort, we hired the brake at the price of 480 francs in French money.

We decided to start early on Sunday morning, 21st of May, and as we had experience of the furnace-like qualities of the heat at midday, we made up our minds to travel only from four to ten o'clock in the morning, then stop for lunch and a siesta, and only to start off again at four o'clock in the afternoon, travelling until ten o'clock at night. On the Saturday, therefore, we went to bed at eleven, having arranged our departure for four o'clock sharp on the following morning.

## CHAPTER VII

### FROM TEHERAN TO ISPAHAN

NEXT morning I woke at three o'clock, but the thought that we were leaving for Ispahan gave me the courage to get up. At four the carriage had not yet arrived, and I sent Aimé down to the stables to inquire for it. As it happened, its lateness made no difference, since the two young married couples overslept themselves, and were not ready until six o'clock. When they appeared the sun was already shining high in the sky. Even then it took another half-hour to get our luggage hoisted on to the roof of the vehicle, and it was nearly seven before we finally set off. We were, in consequence, obliged to reorganize all our arrangements, and to abandon any thoughts of a midday siesta, in order that we might reach Kum—a distance of 95 miles—that evening.

We had no sooner passed the gates of the city than we came to a cemetery, from which an appalling odour emanated. The Persians use no coffins, and they bury their dead almost on the surface of the earth itself. Consequently the light soil gives out the most awful smell, and as we went at walking

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pace the whole length of the cemetery, our sufferings were not inconsiderable. Not long afterwards, besides, the full agony of our coming journey became known to us. Our brake *had* springs, for we had seen them at the posting-house before starting ; but in order to prevent them from acting, the prudent postmaster had jammed an immense wedge of wood between. Consequently every movement of the thing was torture. Moreover, cramped together on a narrow wooden plank, we could not lean back, we could not stretch our legs, we could not change our original positions. Gradually our legs went to sleep, our feet became numbed, our shoulder-blades scorched, our arms absolutely stiff. Finally our spines gave way, while our brains began to feel as if boiled in a cauldron. And we were at this period only a few miles from our starting-point. We began to wonder if our two womenfolk could possibly stand the strain of it all. None of us, however, dared propose a return to Teheran to them. And for that matter, at the moment enthusiasm still sustained the whole party. We were at last on our way to Ispahan.

Our road lay alternately across a desert punctuated at intervals by thousands of tufts of a greeny grey aromatic plant only to be found in sandy places, and over the steep sides of rocky hills. Every now and then the road divided into two or three tracks going round a group of rocks, just as a river might flow round an island, while torrent beds and sandy hillocks were incessant.



## From Teheran to Ispahan

We proceeded at a pace somewhere between a walk and a trot, but happily the heat that day was slightly less excessive. Every quarter of an hour the coachman drew up to whistle to his unfortunate animals the little national tune with which we were already familiar, and about every two or three hours we came upon a posting-house. For lunch, which we had at a *chapar khaneh*, we were offered an empty room alive with flies. Sitting on our port-manteaux, we ate some sardines whose oil had not altogether withstood the temperature, and some preserves cooked by the heat of the sun. To quench our intolerable thirst we drank copious cups of weak and insipid tea.

Later in the afternoon we crossed a second chain of arid mountains, and then fell back again upon the rocky sands of the plateau, broken only by the delicate tufts of the aromatic desert plant, whose grey-green leaves harmonized so deliciously with the peculiar blue-grey colour of the ground. By this time we were covered in sand, and absolutely torpid in intellect. At every posting-house we lost an hour waiting for fresh horses to be harnessed in. Neither threats nor promises had the least effect. Blows might have done so, but we had not yet reached that degree of demoralization.

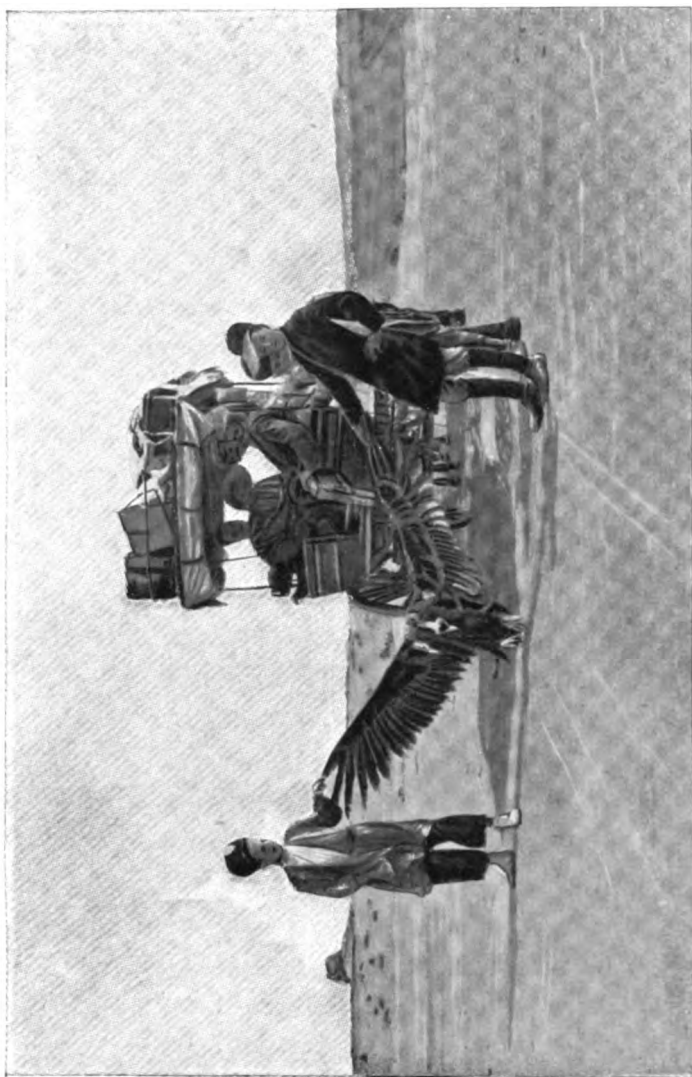
Only one incident broke the afternoon's monotony. A group of vultures were eating the carcass of a dead camel 400 yards away from us. George Bibesco

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

fired at one, and having brought it down, Aimé went and fetched it for us.

At seven o'clock at night we reached a small village called Aliabad. Here we stayed for dinner, the posting-house having a charming garden, and—the luxury of it—some benches and a table. As the inhabitants of Aliabad regarded us with contempt, Aimé boiled us some tea, and heated some vegetables for us in one of our own saucepans. Since, however, native contempt did not extend to our luggage, one of us was obliged to keep guard over it all the time we were there. We ate by candle-light in the garden. While we were doing so, Emmanuel Bibesco confessed that as a result of our awful journey he felt very unwell, and instead of going on with us would wait for a carriage from Kum to take him back to Teheran. Here was a new calamity! For to leave the poor fellow in a place where the inhabitants refused to supply us with even so much as a drink of water was out of the question. Finally we persuaded him to come as far as the next halting-place with us. There, if possible, we would sleep the night, for, it was no good disguising the fact, we were still only half-way to Kum, and the whole of us were exhausted already.

We started in the dark, but this time the extremity of our misery brought on a mood of unnatural gaiety, and we were laughing when we reached the next stopping-place.



A VULTURE SHOT IN THE DESERT BETWEEN TEHERAN AND KUM

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## From Teheran to Ispahan

Here we were shown by some men, who looked more like brigands than anything else, a room of three yards square, into which at a pinch we could squeeze four beds. The next room was occupied, it seemed, by some Persians who were cooking an evil-smelling stew over a charcoal fire set in the middle of the floor. We, on the law that might is right, ousted the Persians, who retired to the stables, and having swept and ventilated the room, set up the rest of our beds in it. This setting up of beds in Persia, I may mention, was no easy matter. First of all, the utmost care had to be taken that no rug hung to the ground and so offered an easy passage to the much-dreaded insects. Then every support—and there were eight—had to be powdered with insect powder, or sleep for the night would have been wholly out of the question. As it was, Emmanuel Bibesco and I discovered that our walls, which we had originally thought black with dirt, were literally covered in flies temporarily pacific through slumber. This lasted until five next morning, when our walls took noisy flight and awoke us.

Going to the window, I saw to my joy, in the enclosed garden of the post-house, a big pool fed from a flowing stream that ran between the olive trees of the small enclosure. Nobody was about, and I rushed down therefore, and plunged into the cool, refreshing water. My friends did the same, after which we breakfasted gaily by the side of the little river. All our troubles of yesterday—the thumping stick

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

wedged between the springs—were forgotten. Once more we were ready to go to the ends of the earth, and even Emmanuel Bibesco decided to continue with us, as far as Kum, at any rate. We started at eight o'clock, and a minute afterwards returned to the agony of yesterday. We proceeded with a heart-breaking slowness along by the great salt lake, while the heat continually grew more unbearable. At every posting-house we fortified ourselves with tea and a hard-boiled egg. We had hoped to reach Kum at noon. But in vain we sought the golden cupola beneath which sleeps the sainted Fatmeh, sister of Imam Reza. At last we saw by the side of the road little irregular heaps consisting of four or five stones. These are placed by the faithful when they see for the first or for the last time the tomb of the above respected Fatmeh. Persians must enjoy good eyesight, for it was not until three o'clock that through a cluster of trees, massed against the horizon, we saw the gleaming cupola of our longing.

. . . . .

At Kum we entered a *chapar khaneh* with a large garden full of flowers and trees. We immediately decided, consequently, to take a well-earned rest, and not to start again until four o'clock next morning, "*inch Allah*" (D.V.).

After dispatching Aimé to the bazaar for food and ice, we found in the courtyard a diligence of the same make as our own, only larger and somewhat differ-

## From Teheran to Ispahan

ently arranged. There were six seats in a sort of front compartment, and four in another behind. Unfortunately it possessed the same bare boards, the same torn curtains to keep out the sun, and—the same wedge of wood to prevent the springs from acting as our previous one. Still we decided to take it, everybody being agreed that nothing on earth would induce them to go further in the old one.

This settled, we retired to the shade of some mulberry trees, and had our beds and luggage brought out to us, for in Persia it is never wise to stray far from a sight of the latter. There was only one room to be had, but we were so happy to be out in the shade that we decided unanimously to spend the night beneath the stars and let Emmanuel Bibesco have the one covered shelter obtainable. And first of all we ate a delicious dish made of rice and milk which Aimé cooked for us, and which we covered thickly with jam. After that we decided that sleep was the most important necessity, and settled ourselves for a two hours' siesta before starting to explore the town of Kum. We undid our camp-beds and stretched ourselves voluptuously under the shade of the mulberry trees. Some of us slept like flies in the sun, others dreamt, and others again wrote. The air was hot and dry, though a wind passed over us, while the sun sank, lighting up the high wall which surrounded the garden, and behind the wall, shining with gold between its four minarets,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

the cupola of the mosque in which sleeps Saint Fatima, who renders Kum famous. Meshed only, in which rests Imam Reza, is, in the eyes of Persians, even more sacred still.

Great white clouds risen from the south came as it were from fabulous Arabia to delight our eyes, and then sailed, high, clear, and beautiful, towards distant Thibet.

Behind the trees one could hear, very faintly, the sound of a flute. The sun grazed the horizon, birds chased each other in branches stirred slowly by the wind : a great calm came over us.

Where was I ?

I did not know, and weariness of mind naturally inclined me to ask no questions at the moment. Worn out by thirty-six hours in the desert, I was aware only that I was lying in a garden which might have been a garden on a hot day in France. I was so tired that I accepted this shut-in garden, these thick trees, this sun-bathed wall, and the red patches made by the flowers in the grass, as part of the ordinary setting of existence. It was only as I stretched myself full length that I managed, in the torpidity preceding sleep, to re-create a sense of the reality of the spot to which six weeks' travelling had brought me. I was in Persia, but it required a great effort to realize the fact. It was necessary to reiterate every second—

“ I am resting in a country far from the one in which I was born. As a child I have often dreamt



## From Teheran to Ispahan

of this, and have reached it step by step, passing through many other countries to get here. Now I have reached the high plateau of Iran, where an immemorial civilization flourishes. I am in a spot traversed by Darius and Alexander, Haroun al-Raschid the good caliph, Genghis Khan, and Timour the scourge of the world. This mosque, which I glance at indifferently, has been for centuries the object of Persian pilgrimages."

Alone in a fanatical town I dream three thousand miles from my own people. My life has dropped behind me while for a feverish moment I say, "I am at Kum, in the heart of Persia, but in a few hours I shall leave these places never to see them again."

. . . . .  
At dusk we left the garden and came upon the river which, swift and brown, flows over the yellow sands of its bed. On the opposite side, above some low buildings set on the borders of the water itself, rose the sacred mosque of Saint Fatmeh. Some *mullahs* in white turbans were walking upon the surrounding terraces. Two big minarets, bold in form and colour, and two small ones, flanked the central cupola, which, above a big archway covered in blue enamelled tiles, glowed dully in the last rays of the setting sun.

Inside there were undoubtedly wonderful Mossul bronzes, tenth-century carpets worth their weight in gold, and perfect *reflets métalliques*—all, in fact,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

that is most exquisite of ten centuries of subtle art in Persia. But these treasures, which European collectors would have given literally anything to possess, we were debarred even from gazing at. The sanctuary of a Persian mosque is not to be entered by a hated stranger. We then walked to the dark and covered-in bazaar. A few imprecations were flung at us in passing. Kum, whose pride is in its possession of Saint Fatmeh, is extremely fanatical. The crowd hates all Europeans, and to see an unveiled woman is an abomination to them. From the narrow, crowded bazaar we passed into the cemetery, though by this time we were exciting an unpleasant excess of curiosity, and were beginning to be pressed round by priests, men, and children, whose contempt, especially for the two ladies, was obvious. Nevertheless we continued our way towards the great mosque, though merely to approach it was sacrilege in the eyes of Kum. From there a little alley led us back to the river, through a street in which lodge the pilgrims who come to visit the sacred tomb. Night was falling, and as we turned homeward we came upon a man driving six little donkeys, with soft and gentle eyes, whose backs were laden with bottles of fragrant-smelling lavender. We stopped to let them pass, doing so for the mere pleasure of the scent that was wafted to us.

. . . . .  
Once back in our big garden we had a merry

## From Teheran to Ispahan

dinner, set out under the trees, our candles piercing the darkness with little flame-like points of light.

Then we prepared for our first night out in the open. We placed our beds under mulberry trees, spread our rugs (and, for a treat, even allowed ourselves sheets), fastened our bags, for fear of thieves, to the foot of our bedsteads, placed our revolvers under our pillows, and our clothes over our feet, said good-night, and blew out the candles by our sides.

The excitement of our journey, and the novelty of camping out of doors in the heart of Persia, kept me from sleeping. A big, half-savage dog roamed about in the darkness, waiting to attack our provisions. Twice I drove him away without effect. As I lay I could see to the right the four minarets of the mosque shining with the lights which are meant to show pilgrims travelling by night the goal of their righteous journey. Suddenly a hot wind swept over us, shaking the mulberry trees and scattering the fruit; the stillness of the night became brusquely full of a strange disquietude and noise. Clouds must have filled the sky, for I could no longer see the stars gleaming. And then, without further warning, came a stronger gust of wind, and with it, unmistakably, slow, big drops of rain.

For a moment we waited, hoping against hope that it would stop. But the drops came faster, began to beat sharply upon our faces, and a minute

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

or two later we were all scampering, the women enveloped in rugs and the men in pyjamas, to the shelter of the house. We carried the beds with all our things on them as best we could, while the rain, already driven by great gusts of wind, whipped our cheeks as we ran against it.

Once in the *chapar khaneh* the three Bibescos shared the one small room. The rest of us made ourselves as comfortable as the circumstances permitted in the shelter of the portico, piling luggage and provisions in a heap between our beds. By this time it was midnight, and in three hours it would be necessary to get up again. Close to us the old postmaster, asleep on a rug, was snoring horribly. Aimé, exhausted, had flung himself, face downwards, on the floor of one of the carriages.

We also tried an interval of slumber. But almost immediately the little gnawing sound of mice at our provisions disturbed peacefulness. Three separate times we drove them away; they came back immediately. At last, resigned to the inevitable, we decided to let them do their worst, provided that they left our ears in safety.

Presently a sudden commotion roused us afresh. This time a cat had upset three boxes of preserves and broken two glasses. The mice had naturally gone, but the cat was now enjoying an evening meal instead. We sat in our beds and gazed at him, literally past all sensations of anger. For sleep under the portico was almost impossible any way,

## From Teheran to Ispahan

the wind driving gusts of rain every now and then into our faces, while presently two Persians drove into the courtyard and commenced to argue with their coachman. They went at last, and I was falling into a fitful sleep when a hot breath on my cheek once more woke me. The dog, who had followed us from the garden, had now replaced the cat among our provisions. Through sheer exhaustion we took no notice. Later on, when half awake, I saw a donkey's head in the same close proximity, and I displayed the same indifference. I had reached the point when nothing would have induced me to put myself out for a donkey. Let him eat if he wanted to.

A little later came the sound of tinkling bells. A caravan of camels was leaving the caravanserai. One of the animals, as they passed, came to see what sort of creatures we were, lying sleepless under a doorway. We let him, without protest, take as a little remembrance of us what remnants of our provisions had been left by our previous visitors, the donkey, cat, dog, and mice. At three o'clock, after a sleepless, but hardly monotonous night, we rose to be ready to start for once at four punctually. We then ascertained that our night's menagerie had eaten a pot of *foie gras*, some rice, bread, and twenty-four hard-boiled eggs intended for our next day's journey. We could but pray for their digestions.

. . . . .

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

For all our efforts, we started late as usual. In our wild rush across the garden the previous evening, some of our small packages had got mislaid. By the time we had found them the sky was once more imperturbably and undesirably blue above us.

Our new diligence had two compartments, however, and we cheered ourselves by thinking that we could move about and pay each other little visits on the way, to relieve the monotony. Before we got out of Kum, unfortunately, we were one solid hour getting through the bazaar, which was so narrow, two out of our four horses had to be unharnessed, while even so the wheels of the diligence tore down the front of the stalls, carried away some of the shutters, grazed the walls, displaced the stones, upset the oven of a baker's shop and crushed the toes of careless pedestrians. Naturally enough, our progress was in consequence accompanied by one long outcry of abuse and malediction.

Once through, moreover, our troubles were far from being at an end. The system of irrigation was once in Persia brought to a considerable degree of perfection. Deep and covered canals brought the water from the hills down to the towns and surrounding gardens. But for many centuries the people, grown degenerate, have ceased to keep the canals in repair. The covered arches that protected them have collapsed in numberless places, and the water, in consequence, blocked in its pro-

## From Teheran to Ispahan

gress, surges over into the roadway. Consequently, we were obliged more than once to get out while the diligence either crossed little lakes, or deep ditches, or climbed some embankment. Two hours after our departure we were only two miles distant from Kum, and as our road from here was for some time to be confined to the mountains, our progress would naturally continue to be slow.

Nevertheless, we were full of courage and enthusiasm, and reiterated joyfully that the worst of the journey was over (how little we knew!), and that the rest would be perfectly easy. The sun by now was high, and we began to climb up a bare-looking mountain. Not a tree, not a field, not a blade of grass, was to be seen. Our diligence, we had already discovered, was, after all, no better than our brake. The thudding of the pole against the carriage was just as unceasing and just as hard to bear as ever. Moreover, we realized gloomily that our bodies, instead of growing inured to the thumping, became more and more sensitive at every blow, while every fresh jolt of the diligence grew to be absolute agony. Added to this a new torture harassed us. For the first time we were literally covered in perfectly maddening flies.

In the middle of the day we stopped at a posting-house to change horses and to have some lunch. I ought to mention that *chapar khanehs* in this part of the country proved nothing like so good as those between Kum and Teheran. At this par-

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

ticular one not a room was to be had, or for that matter even a charcoal stove or the primitive *samovar* previously found everywhere. We had our lunch, consequently, by the side of a little pool, into which we dangled our feet for coolness. A few willows very inadequately sheltered us from the sun. But we boiled some tea over our spirit lamps, protecting the flame from the wind with the leggings of our womenfolk, though, when all is said and done, it was a great deal of trouble for a very poor result.

All the afternoon, exhausted by the heat of the wind, we drove through the mountains. The backs of our poor horses also were covered in open, poisoned sores, from which an awful stench emanated. At each posting-house—where there were always trees and a stream of some sort—we drank copiously either of weak tea, or more unwisely of the running water, as the impurity of the latter was certain, while two out of every three times it would be actually salt as well. By nine o'clock at night we reached Kashan. Here Zobeideh, the first and favourite wife of Haroun al-Raschid, was born. The town is, besides, famous for its silk and copper industry, for an old Mongolian mosque, and for its scorpions.

Thanks to the kindness of the English minister at Teheran, we were to pass the night at the Indian telegraph office. The head of the department received us with the utmost cordiality, and gave us



## From Teheran to Ispahan

excellent iced drinks, and some delicious pilaff. Unfortunately it was beyond his power to cool the atmosphere or to annihilate the mosquitoes, so that we passed a very bad night in consequence.

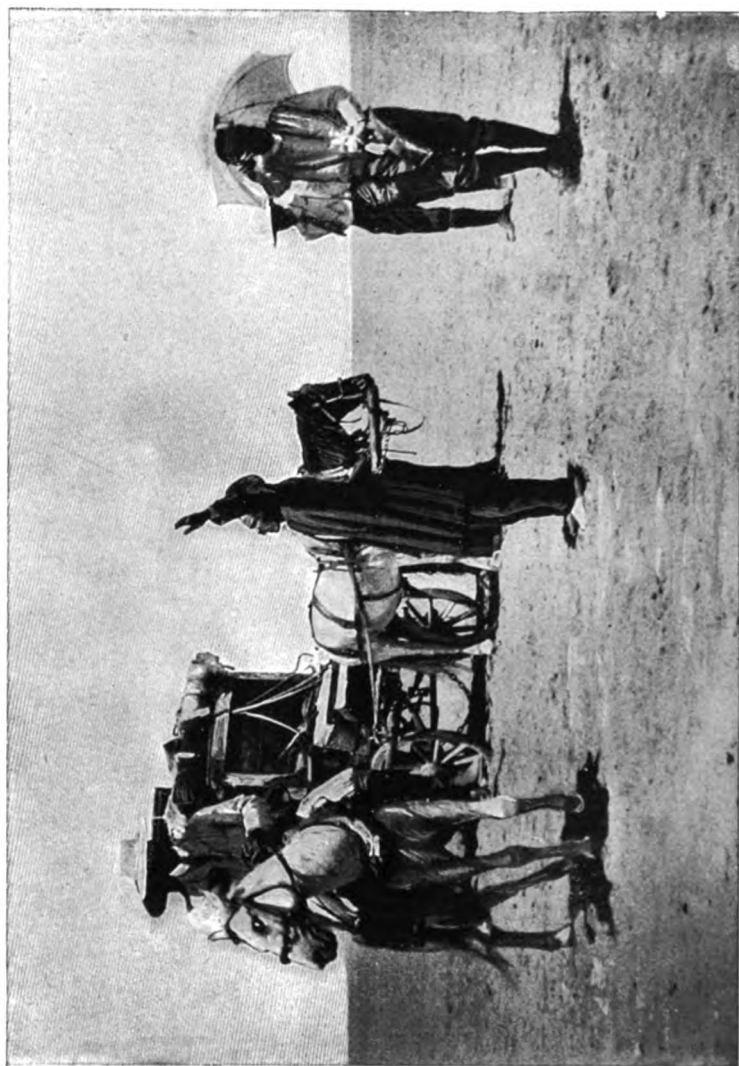
We had arranged to start again before dawn next morning, but, as usual, we were four hours late. If the reader has any tendency to feel irritated at this incessant lateness, let him think for a moment of the circumstances of the case. After a whole day's thumping in the diligence we only got to bed by midnight, and even then, what with the heat, the mosquitoes, and our intense exhaustion, we could not get to sleep for a considerable time. Four o'clock would strike before any of us had yet done more than doze uncomfortably. Then a conscientious member of the party, looking at his watch and seeing that it was time to get up again, would reflect that a moment or two would make no difference to the day, and that perhaps the two women, so brave and so much in need of quietude, were still peacefully sleeping. While he was dwelling tenderly upon their courage and sufferings, the watch would go round the hour again, and it would be five o'clock. By this time Aimé, asleep on the floor, would be languidly bestirring himself. To get on to his weak and weary legs usually took him thirty minutes exactly, though, that once done, his dressing was an accomplished business. He would then call the rest of the party. But as everybody thought

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

the same thing—"I am sure to be kept waiting by the others, I can allow myself an extra quarter of an hour"—the end was the loss of another hour at least. Then the kettle would not boil for tea, and getting the luggage on to the diligence was no easy matter, so that on this particular occasion it was eight o'clock before we started from Kashan, driving through its half-ruined streets in the governor's state carriage, and accompanied by an escort of cavalry. Both carriage and escort left us at the entrance of the desert, when our tribulations once more started.

We were no longer in the mountains, which rose at some distance on our right. Instead we faced an infinite, gently undulating desert. The wheels of the diligence sank continually about six inches in the sand, and at last the horses, absolutely exhausted, stood still and refused to go further. We were obliged, regardless of the burning sun, to get down and help to turn the wheels. But at ten o'clock, so little progress had we made, we were not yet five miles from Kashan, and the first posting-house was quite twelve miles away still.

It was at this point that the diligence finally became embedded, and the horses definitely refused to budge another inch. We were then in the middle of the desert, and the sun, straight above us, was giving out such tremendous heat that the sand apparently vibrated under it. To our left stood only some low sand-dunes, but to the right we sud-



STRANDED IN THE DESERT. 105° IN THE SHADE, ONLY THERE WAS NO SHADE

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## From Teheran to Ispahan

denly discovered a charming oasis, with trees stirring in the breath of the wind. And since there were trees, water was a foregone conclusion. We were dying of thirst, and two of the party, therefore, unharnessed the horses and rode towards the oasis to fetch some. At the end of five minutes they were back again. The oasis, the green trees, the revivifying breeze, were all illusions ; we were surrounded on every side by scorching sands and nothing else. Meanwhile we were all once more becoming torpid with heat, the sand alone being so frightfully hot none of us could even hold it in our hands. While one of us, therefore, actually went to sleep under the conveyance itself, the rest of us crouched together within the small space of shade it cast on one side.

We had dispatched Aimé on horseback to fetch more horses from Kashan, and for two whole hours we sat motionless, waiting, in the hottest part of the desert, and at a time of day when no Persian would have dared to venture out of doors, for his return with them. From time to time the monotonous immensities of sand dispersed, and rivers gradually formed and joined at the foot of the dunes, running limpid and cool beneath trees reflected in their depths. We were, in fact, surrounded by mirages, but so clearly defined, so real and life-like, that each time we were deceived afresh.

Towards noon Aimé returned with three horses and a second coachman.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

After many kicks, broken traces, and useless joltings, the diligence started. But at walking pace only, and it took us two hours consequently to reach the next posting-house.

. . . . .

Conversation during the fourth stage of our journey. At the posting-house :—

“ Aimé, is there a room to be had ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ A portico, then ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ No means of resting at all ? ”

“ No, sir.”

“ Oh, here by a stream is a willow that will shelter us.”

“ It is a poor shelter, this willow, with nothing but a trunk and two branches.”

“ I have nothing else to offer you.”

“ We are dying of it.”

“ Not yet.”

“ Give me a little room near the trunk. Each of us has the right to have at least one side in the shade.”

“ Aimé, bring the provisions.”

“ The stream looks very clear.”

“ Look at the goats washing in it.”

“ A lamb might quench its thirst.”

“ If you think that will prevent my drinking.”

“ I'm hungry.”

## From Teheran to Ispahan

" I am unpacking some ham."

" Hang the ham ! "

" Biscuits and jam then ? "

" There are two hard-boiled eggs each."

" If you take three, I promise I will take four."

" Has this spoon been in anybody's mouth ? "

" Oh, if you are as particular as that."

" My feet are in mud and my head in the sun."

" Job had, at least, his dung-hill."

" Shall I pour a little water on your head ? "

" Why, it's really rather nice."

" Shall I pour a glass down your back between the skin and your clothes ? "

" Innocent pastimes of the desert."

" I'm still hungry."

" You really are very exacting."

Then, all together :—

" Aimé, bring me a cup of tea."

" Aimé, wash my dish."

" Aimé, cook the peas."

" Aimé, tell them to harness the horses."

" Aimé, a lemon."

" Aimé, sugar."

" Aimé, give me some jam."

" Aimé, bring my bag."

" Aimé, what are you doing ? You stand there dreaming, but you are not here to amuse yourself."

On the road. Three o'clock in the desert :—

" Lean your head on my shoulder as if you loved me. The shoulder of a friend is a soft pillow for a well-shaped head."

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

"Do my legs inconvenience you? Be sure and tell me, for I shan't in the least mind telling you if yours get in my way."

"There is no road, but there are channel beds."

"It is a mistake to think that sand lessens the jolting. All it does is to hide the holes. The wheel falls in a hole, the sand slips away, and diligence and passengers bewail."

"There are fewer flies than yesterday. They don't like the heat."

"What a bare-looking desert!"

"A desert is always bare."

"Not a tree, not a bird, not a human being, not a reptile, not even a camel."

"Camels are too sensible to take the risk of mid-day among these burning sands."

"There are only ourselves."

"That is my opinion."

"It is understood that we are here for pleasure."

"To think that people are now out in the Bois de Boulogne, and quite unaware of their own good luck."

"At this moment we are in the bed of a river. I have discovered that Persia is a country of dried-up rivers."

"What things you do say."

"What a hard shoulder yours is. I should never have believed it. You do take people in."

"What a grotesque idea to have brought this useless and encumbering gun."



## From Teheran to Ispahan

"Oh, no; don't stop the diligence to kill a beastly vulture."

"Why is it following us?"

"It is the shark of the desert. It follows on the chance of disaster."

"Shall we find shelter to-night?"

"I have had enough of it; I won't go any further."

"That decision is superfluous. We are once more stuck in the desert."

It is true we were again engulfed, midway between two posting-houses. We were stranded in a heat that literally made us smart, waiting for a fresh relay of horses. The time crawled by. At this rate, when should we reach Ispahan? We should be lucky if to-day we could do as much as twenty-five miles.

In the diligence, to while away the long hours of waiting, we talked. Tersely one of us would evoke the vision of a grey or blue wind-freshened sea, coming in silver-edged waves to die upon some sandy shore; or we talked of our homes, of faded hangings, of flowers on the table, of a wood fire roaring up the chimney, of rare books lying to one's hand, of all the sweet, intimate things belonging to the life we had left so far behind, and which came with such potent power to disturb when spoken of in the burning, solitary desert of Iran, where neither men, nor plants, nor dwellings are to be found. Nevertheless, to escape

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

the torturing present we plunged with feverish intensity into endless memories of the past.

Towards five o'clock the worst of the heat seemed over. We decided to get down and walk to the next posting-house. We started cheerfully enough, with the cry of "To Ispahan!" but the sand was so fine that it slipped perpetually away from under our feet, and to walk on it proved impossible. We were ignominiously obliged to return to the weariness of our diligence. At this point, flinging himself down under a huge umbrella and the illusory shade of a dwarf shrub, Emmanuel Bibesco declared that he would end his days there. The rest of us settled at the sides of the wheels, though, as regards coolness, we might just as well have settled on the top of an oven.

Right in the distance we could see the whiteness of some snow-covered mountains, until suddenly the sand grew dark, the desert violet, and the hills blue. For a brief interval the sky turned yellow, mauve, and violet-coloured above our heads, and then brusquely, in a minute as it were, night had fallen.

. . . . .

Our moods changed incessantly. Every now and then weariness overpowered us, nobody would speak, and gazing at each other with dreary eyes we would reflect silently upon the folly of our adventure. Then, suddenly the chance accident of some happy phrase would bring a general laugh, and

## From Teheran to Ispahan

our tempers would rise once more to the level of a triumphant gaiety. For all our miseries, we caught some transient moments of pleasure in our abominable journey from Teheran to the apparently inaccessible Ispahan of our yearnings.

Presently the coachman returned with two more horses, and at half-past eight in the evening we reached the posting-house of Mahominadab.

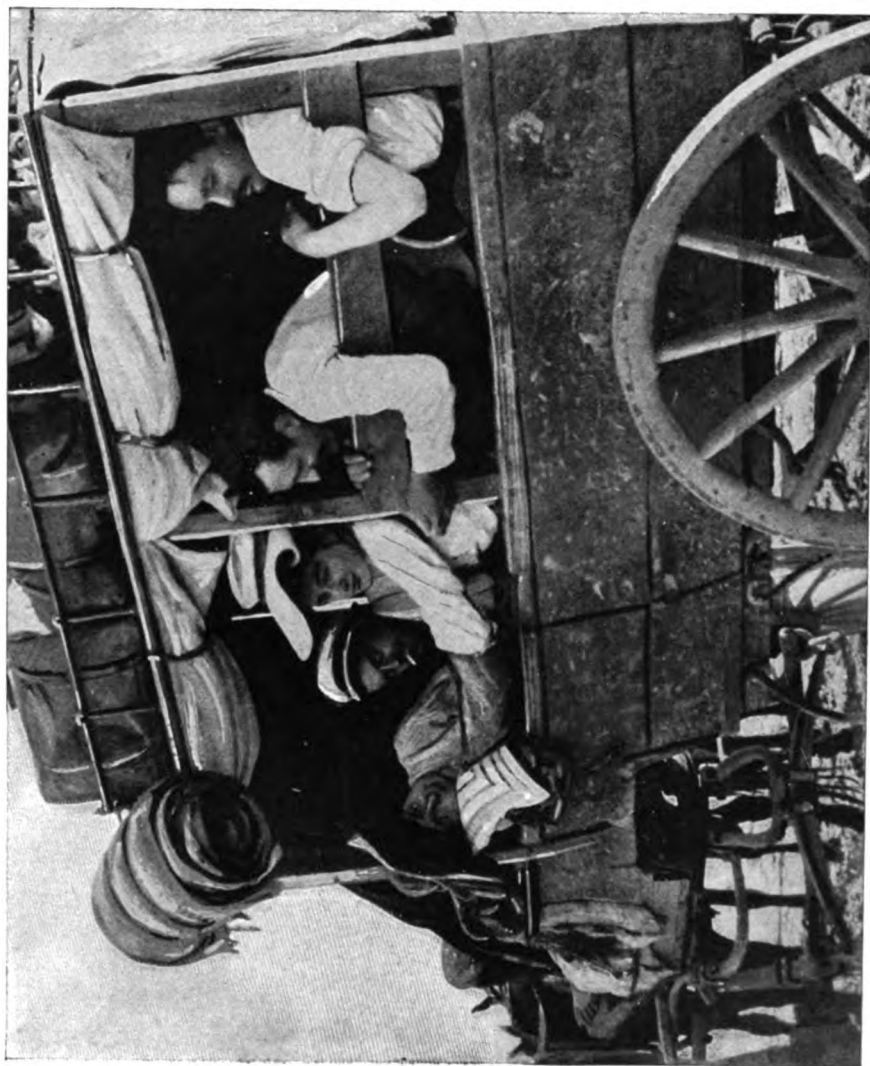
There we had a tremendous dispute with the post-master, as we demanded six fresh horses instead of four. Aimé, who looked like a girl among the others, nevertheless browbeat men at least three times his size. While he was arguing we went into the house to drink the tea which by this time had become indispensable to us. Here, in a sort of arcade, raised a little above the level of the courtyard, an old man with mahogany-coloured fingers was sitting on the ground, stirring with his bare hands some pieces of charcoal under a brazier on which stood two or three teapots. He poured into glasses a concoction he called tea, but which tasted like straw. To touch one of the teapots for ourselves was forbidden, as, in the eyes of the filthy-looking old man, we were "unclean," and our touch would have desecrated the utensils used for the food of the "pure." Taking some sugar out of an old handkerchief, he handed the glasses to us with an expression of utter disgust. But we were so enfeebled, both in mind and body, that we sat meekly on a vermin-eaten mat, and waited while the awful

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

brew was being got ready for us. A little further on, under the same arcade, a group of men in rags were sitting in a semicircle on the ground. Their faces were so brown as to be almost black, and their heads were shaved, save for a little tuft of hair on each side. Some seemed to be Hindoos, the others were singularly like negroes. Without speaking they passed an enormous wooden pipe from one to the other. A lamp, hanging in the centre above them, lit up their motionless figures and the rags that they wore with an air almost bordering upon pride. Beyond them a boy, nearly naked, was keeping a charcoal fire glowing by means of a palm-leaf fan.

. . . . .

Having left there we drove steadily from nine o'clock till one. Every few minutes we fell into a doze, only to be wakened up again by an extra hard thump from the pole as we jolted over some stony lumps. At the next posting-house Aimé assured us we could get a room and some rest, and in the meanwhile the night was exquisite—the air crisp and dry, and the sky literally blazing with stars, so brilliant it seemed impossible to believe they were the same pale things we could see above our heads in Europe. The Milky Way, hardly visible in Paris, shone here with the brilliancy of stars of the second order. The sky, indeed, viewed from a Persian plateau, is truly a wonderful and moving thing to see.



THE PERSIAN DILIGENCE: OUR FIFTH DAY'S TORTURE

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## From Teheran to Ispahan

At midnight we drew up under a monumental-looking doorway. Persians have a taste for the colossal, for quite a number of posting-houses have a magnificent-looking doorway—leading nowhere. For them, apparently, a frontage is sufficient satisfaction. Here there was nothing else, and Aimé, promising us that we could find accommodation at the next village, we resigned ourselves to passing most of the night in the diligence. We got out, however, and, sitting upon some stones, ate by the light of the moon some hard-boiled eggs and biscuits, while we drank some tea we boiled over the uncertain flame of our spirit lamps. The limbs of the whole party were numbed by the number of hours we had spent in our awful conveyance.

. . . . .

We seemed finally to have found, however, on this the fifth day of our journey from Teheran, the one way, as far as we were concerned, of starting in time, which was, not to go to bed at all. When we set off once more we arranged the seats as best we could to enable our two ladies to lie down on them, and though we were all dead tired we enjoyed at least a respite from the heat, as well as the sense that at last we were making a certain amount of headway towards our destination.

Towards five in the morning the dawn spread across the sky. Venus still gleamed like a diamond in the east, but the other stars commenced to fade.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

And in the dawning light we saw an oasis, real this time, consisting of lovely fields of corn and rye, of white poppies, limpid streams running alongside the road, and in the distance a picturesque village whose houses were castellated like old-fashioned castles. The effect was wonderfully imposing, until we discovered, as we drew near, that they were simply ruins, whose clay walls could easily have been kicked down by anybody.

At the next posting-house we jumped out almost as soon as the diligence drew up. At last we could sleep and rest ourselves. But oh, horrors! there was nothing save some subterranean stables—not a room, not a shelter, not even a tree we could sit under and so be protected from the sun.

Despair and anger surged together. But fronted by the inexorable simplicity of the fact that there was *nothing*, anger gradually died out of us, and we felt thankful to find a stream we could bathe in, and some goat's milk we could drink, milked for us on the spot from some little black goats which had just come down from the mountains. By seven we were on the road once more, having hardly left our conveyance for twenty-four hours at a stretch.

. . . . .

We now began to ascend the mountains again, the road climbing the sides of steep cliffs, and obliging us continually to get down and help to push the wheels of our diligence. Finally the horses



## From Teheran to Ispahan

once more refused to move. It was only what we might have expected. Having been embedded in sands one day, of course the next we must be stranded upon the side of the mountain. Obviously we were to experience every possible emotion that could be gained by travelling in a Persian conveyance.

Once more we were reduced to sending Aimé on horseback for a fresh supply of horses. The posting-house was an hour's ride, and we sat drearily in the scorching heat, wondering vaguely if we should ever see Ispahan at the end of it all. When the fresh horses arrived, moreover, they proved to be vicious beasts, and kicked instead of pulling. One coachman had to walk at their heads, and at last, by means of the pole, to pull the carriage from right to left, according to necessity. In this fashion we covered the most difficult and dangerous pass in the mountains.

The scenery itself was impressive, and we seemed to be travelling, not in our own earth, but in some burnt-out regions of the moon. Undulating mountains of lava extended on either side—a series of extinct craters, looking like ghostly and abandoned amphitheatres, with here and there a peak, down the sides of which lay great trails of yellow sulphur. Presently we came upon mountain crests broken up by some violent eruption, and upon sheer walls of rock of every colour, from a dull red to a deep purple. But not a tree, not a patch of grass, was to be seen. On every side of us stretched a storm-battered

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

desolation. We were in a world overtaken by death, and petrified as it were in the violent struggles of its last agony.

Through these wild and broken mountains our progress was slow and difficult. We galloped up steep hills only to find an absolutely precipitous descent on the other side, which we were obliged to take at a walking pace. And presently, as we took the summit of a small pass at a gallop, the leader got out of hand and bolted down a sharp incline, followed of course by the other four horses. The coachman shouted, the vehicle rocked, the wheels on the right side were lifted right off the ground, and the weight of the heavy carriage flung towards the precipice on our left. We could see below us the violet-coloured rocks, upon which we were about to be dashed—when the diligence righted itself, settled once more upon its four wheels, and rushed madly to the bottom of the pass. Once there we stopped, but never would any of us see death closer at hand than we had done for those few awful seconds. After such an experience we drove the coachman off his box, one of us taking his place. The other coachman still continued to run at the horses' heads. And by eleven we had reached the next posting-house, where at last we found an actual building, a stream, and some trees to sit under. We had arrived at Imanzadeh-Sultan Ibrahim.

. . . . .  
As we got down from the diligence we noticed

## From Teheran to Ispahan

in the courtyard a man dressed in black with a carbine slung across his shoulders, who stared at us a good deal. Presently Aimé, visibly disturbed, drew me aside and whispered—

“Sir, this man is a famous robber. I know him well. He is a Bakhtiari. We shall have to be very careful.”

The Bakhtiaris are a highland tribe, both lawless and robbers. I communicated, therefore, Aimé's sensational news to the rest of the party, and we kept wary eyes upon our luggage. There was only one tiny room to be had, which we offered to the women and one husband. The other three men made up their camp-beds in a straw shed, almost equally full of dust and mice. While we were busy going backwards and forwards with our things the man in black continued openly to watch us, and presently as I passed spoke to me in English.

I was staggered—here was a brigand chief who could speak English. He knew, however, about ten words only, and after a few ordinary civilities conversation ceased for want of sustenance. While the ladies were tidying in the tiny bedroom the rest of us had a bath in the stream, after which we all collected together for lunch under the shade of a plantain. The postmaster had lent us a *samovar* and a chafing dish, and had been able actually to provide us with some eggs and bread. Consequently we ate heartily and merrily.

But the man in black had not left us. With him

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

were four or five other Bakhtiariis, dressed in the ordinary Persian manner. Only never in my life have I seen men more covered in cartridge belts, daggers, and weapons of all sorts. In order to show them that we also were armed, George Bibesco went and fetched his gun and carbine, which at last served some useful purpose. We then went in for a sort of shooting competition, bringing down some magnificent bee-eaters, with blue and yellow wings. Then, as the postmaster informed us that we should have to start again at four o'clock in order to cross a mountain pass no less dangerous than that of the morning, we went to rest, closing as best we could doors that had never known the luxury of locks. We slept very little, owing to the rats, of which the barn was full. But we had had a bath, we were lying down, we were able to stretch our legs and be at peace. As we lay all the experiences of the last few days rose up before us as in a waking dream. And we thought of Ispahan, the inaccessible. The knowledge, moreover, that if we ever reached there we should have to come back along the identical route on which we had suffered so much, gave us all dreams of permanently settling in Persia.

Suddenly Aimé knocked on the door of the barn. "Monsieur ! Monsieur !" he exclaimed, "we are lost ! we are lost !"

For sheer emotion he could say no more. Finally he went on—

"The brigand has taken advantage of your sleep.

## From Teheran to Ispahan

He has collected a dozen men, all armed with daggers and carbines, and they have gone to wait for you in the mountains."

The devil they had ! Aimé went on—

"One is left here to let them know when you start."

I went out to the archway at the entrance. True enough, a man on horseback, with a carbine slung across his shoulders, was riding backwards and forwards in front of the door. With that I returned to the barn, and a council of three took place. Aimé's information was serious enough. We were in the heart of the mountains, and far from any possibility of help, being over sixty miles from the nearest Indian telegraph office. We had also two women to take care of. What should we do ? Wait at the posting-house ? But wait for what ? Nobody ever came that way. Go back ? Never. Should we try to go on, notwithstanding they were twelve in number ? But we were Europeans, and as such enjoyed an immeasurable prestige in their eyes. The brother of the Shah was to receive us at Ispahan; we had been the guests of the Persian Government at Teheran. In a way we were rather important people for brigands to handle lightly. We therefore decided to take the risks, and having done so congratulated ourselves upon our heroism. We even made jokes about the consequences of our possible encounter. Emmanuel Bibesco offered to lend us money to save our skins. Another declared that he would sell his life dearly. As for me, I pulled out

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

my notebook and counted my banknotes. I had 250 francs and a letter of credit of no use to a brigand ; but I remarked that, little as I valued my life, it was worth more to me than that sum, and that I should willingly give the former if it was asked for, even discourteously. But for all our cheerfulness we were preoccupied in mind ; the adventure ahead of us had no really pleasing qualities. Our laughter was laboured, and when we questioned the post-master he seemed to be uneasy also.

Meanwhile the twelfth brigand was still coolly walking up and down outside, waiting for our departure.

We woke up the two ladies and concealed our anxiety as best we could. When all our luggage had been piled on to the diligence, the man watching us galloped off in the direction which we were immediately to take ourselves. We got out guns and carbines, and loaded them ready. Aimé implored us to let him have a gun, and promised to kill four single-handed. But we thought it safest to allow him no fire-arms whatsoever, and for that matter to see ourselves what diplomacy could do, before resorting to violence of any sort. George Bibesco, his wife, and I, were in the coupé, Phérékyde, his wife, and Emmanuel Bibesco in the back part of the vehicle.

It was a tense experience. In an hour, perhaps, we should be prisoners. Possibly the idea was to keep us in the mountains and get a large sum for

## From Teheran to Ispahan

our ransom. Possibly the only intention was robbery. Now all these sort of adventures are thrilling when described in literature, but when you come personally to go through them they are merely plainly and unmitigatedly unpleasant.

The diligence continued slowly along a valley, with arid and rocky mountains to the right. These rose sheer from the side of the road. Nothing, therefore, could have offered a better opportunity for an ambushade. Aimé, on the box, was beside himself with excitement, and stood up perpetually to gaze at the far distance. Suddenly he called out with a shrill note of distress, "There they are! there they are!" Disquietude ran through the party, and we leant out to see for ourselves. Surely enough in the distance some men were coming down the rocks towards the diligence. There was nothing to be done but to face the worst.

The diligence jolted heavily in their direction, but it seemed an eternity before we got up to them. As the brigand and I could both speak English, I had been selected as spokesman for the party, and I sat thinking out what I had better say to him.

Presently in the valley to our left more men came upon the scene, running towards the road. There were too many—to make a stand was out of the question. A minute went by, and we could see quite clearly a number of men either sitting or standing by the roadside. But at the same moment a dip in the track revealed to us a camping caravan,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

and we knew that we were saved. The *tchavardars*, or camel men, are the most honest in the world. They have no mind for ambushes, or for laying traps for unwary travellers.

We sighed with a heartfelt relief. Though we had been prepared to surrender at the least all we had with us, the comfort of having nothing to surrender at all was very great. At the same time we were by no means yet entirely out of danger. It was possible the brigands might prefer to work at night-time. Nevertheless, having escaped the immediate calamity, we refused to take on further and premature troubles. Suddenly Aimé's voice broke out again.

"Get down, everybody! get down, everybody!" he shouted sharply.

We did so, guns in hand. But there were no brigands. We had merely reached so steep a summit the coachman thought it safer to empty the diligence. Remembering the morning's experience, when we had hung for the fraction of a second in danger of leaving our mangled bodies upon a ledge of violet rocks below, we decided with alacrity to walk to the bottom. This we had to do three or four more times in the course of the day. But no brigands appeared, and towards half-past seven in the evening we safely reached the next posting-house.

Here we asked if any horsemen had been seen, but none had passed that way. The road ahead of us, therefore, was clear. Consequently we decided



## From Teheran to Ispahan

unanimously to go on, though, as a matter of fact, we had really no option to do anything else, as the said posting-house had not the smallest shelter to offer us.

But as regards the brigands—were they really brigands after all? It is impossible for me to say; I can only relate things as they happened. Certainly a dozen men, armed to the teeth, departed from Imanzadeh-Sultan Ibrahim while we slept, leaving one behind to watch over our movements. Then the moment we were ready to start he also dashed off at a gallop. For the rest I am in the dark. Whether they were simply going to meet friends in the caravan we subsequently encountered, or whether they really had sinister intentions towards us, and on second thoughts considered them best not put into execution, is more than I know myself. All that I can assert is that, brigands or no brigands, they certainly gave us some hours of very unpleasant excitement.

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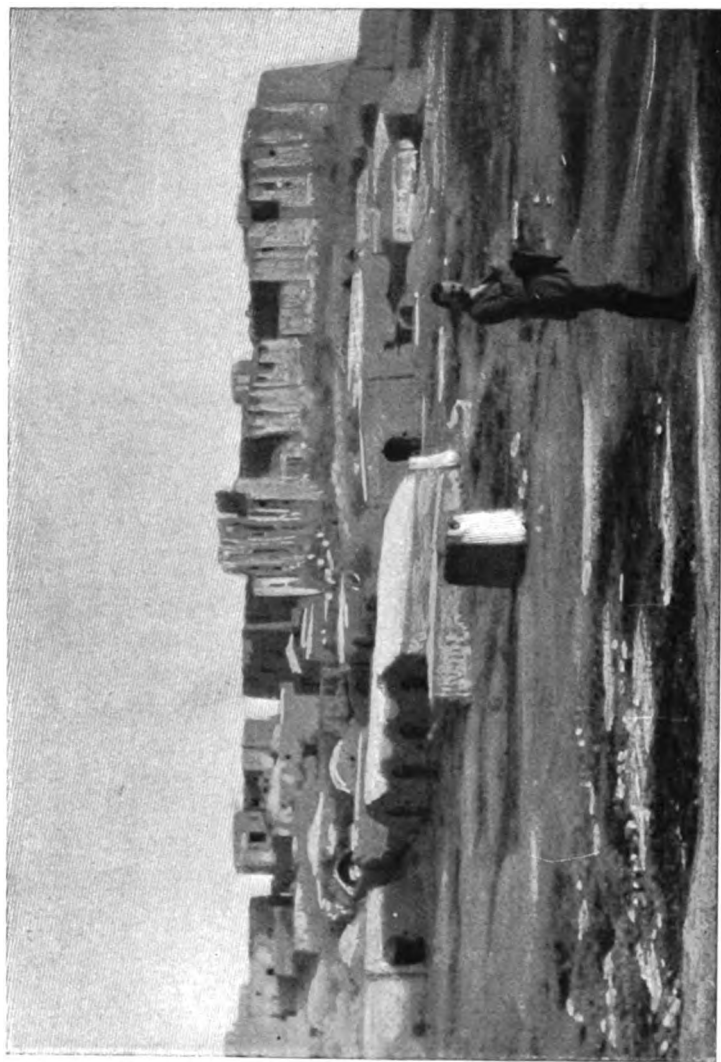
At the posting-house we had some tea out of doors. We were now only a trifle over sixty miles from Ispahan, and in spite of all we had gone through felt that at last we were nearing the end of trouble. We should certainly arrive there, possibly dead, but at least we should arrive. At the next halting-place Aimé promised us the certainty of shelter, and we therefore settled ourselves in the diligence for another night on the road. A fresh breeze had

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

risen, and, after having nearly died of heat, we now shivered with cold behind the cotton curtains that, being full of holes, offered no protection whatsoever from the icy wind. At eleven o'clock, prostrated with fatigue, we reached another *chapar khaneh*, but here, again, there was not so much as a hut to shelter us. All it possessed was a monumental-looking frontage, and at the back—nothing.

It took an hour, however, to change horses. Meanwhile we walked about, trying to get warm again, though the two women dozed as they walked—leaning on our arms. Emmanuel Bibesco, meanwhile, lay down at the foot of the wall and slept. At midnight we started off again. The wind was freezing, but we were numbed with pain, and had lost the strength even to complain. The diligence, in fact, at this point carried six unresisting and almost unconscious beings. Outside, on the box, kept from falling by the driver in front, Aimé also was asleep, though, as far as he was concerned, never had there been such an easy journey.

At three o'clock we reached Murchakar, where the road joins that going to Kashan over the mountains and Kuhrud. This time we were determined to rest, if only on the bare ground. The sole accommodation, however, the postinaster could offer us was a sort of hole one had to go down two steps to get into, and which proved an old lime-kiln, with walls blackened by smoke, and with no air save the little that filtered through an



A POST-HOUSE BETWEEN KASHAN AND ISPAHAN

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## From Teheran to Ispahan

opening at the top of its dome-shaped roof. When we arrived it was full of fowls, but these were very soon driven out—Aimé wringing the neck of one for our breakfast—and we put our six camp-beds together as we best could on the uneven flooring. This, and collecting the luggage, took an hour, but by four o'clock we were in bed. To-morrow, the sixth day of our journey, we should, "*inch Allah*," be at Ispahan before nightfall.

At eight o'clock Aimé and the postmaster called us. The heaviness of the atmosphere had merely increased our torpor, and but for the nearness of Ispahan we should never have had the strength to drag our weary bodies out of the airless furnace. Aimé had cooked the fowl caught the previous evening, but it was as tough as a piece of leather.

After a plunge in the stream we started off again about ten o'clock, this time not to stop again until we reached Ispahan.

We were back in the sandy plain once more. The heat was intense, the sands beneath us quivering with it, and once more we were surrounded by beautiful mirages, showing trees, rivers, limpid-looking lakes, and green foliage stirring refreshingly in the breeze. Presently we passed a *chapar khaneh*, then a caravanserai, then some travellers on donkeys. One began to feel the nearness of a town. And at last, about one o'clock, we saw a line of trees upon the horizon.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

"Ispahan!" cried Aimé triumphantly from the box.

Ispahan? We drew near very slowly, though gradually we could see the domes of mosques between the trees, and one blue cupola to the left dominating the rest. That was the mosque of royalty. At the last posting-house a carriage with four horses was waiting, from which a frock-coated Persian descended to meet us. He carried a letter from his master, S. A. I. Zil-es-Sultan, brother of the Shah and Governor of Ispahan, offering us the use of one of his palaces, and of his carriages from the gates of the city.

We accepted the carriages and refused the palace, being already the guests of the Russian Consulate. Then we continued our way, crossing the fields of white poppies that make a belt of flowers round Ispahan, while little irrigating canals crossed the road at every step.

We were pale, worn out, dishevelled. But we began to pull ourselves into an upright position. Our energy, at least, was intact, and we were nearing Ispahan. At the gates, besides, a general and a hundred red Cossacks were waiting for us with two gala landaus, all covered in with glass panels. The *carrouzar*, or mayor of the town, was also there to receive us. Personally we felt our dilapidated diligence far more in keeping with our condition than his Majesty's carriages. Six days across the desert had left considerable traces both upon our

## From Teheran to Ispahan

clothes and our appearances. An obscure and unnoticed entry into Ispahan would have been vastly more to our liking. But the carriages were there and we had to make use of them. So, preceded by the escort of Cossacks, we made our entry across the streets and bazaars of Ispahan.

The crowd pressed round to see the Europeans, but all it got for its curiosity was the vision, behind the clouds of dust raised by the Cossacks' horses, of two women with untidy hair, and four dusty, travel-stained men. Still, in spite of our clothes, something triumphant radiated from our persons. We had reached Ispahan.

## CHAPTER VIII

### A WEEK AT ISPAHAN

WE reached Ispahan on the Friday at four o'clock, and drove to the Russian Consulate, a four-sided building without any windows upon the front at all, but with a garden in the quadrangle full of shrubs and roses. As we drove up we passed between a line of Cossacks, standing with drawn swords. Monsieur Tcherkine, *chargé d'affaires*, came out to receive us with a great bouquet of flowers in his hands.

We were dusty but dignified, our one obsession being that now at last we should sit upon chairs with springs again. And once in the drawing-room our hearts literally filled at the sight of tables, carpets, arm-chairs, and a divan. Our last resting-place, be it remembered, had consisted of an old lime-kiln. Small wonder we had learnt the true valuation of the word comfort, and that a chair had now come to signify to us one of the precious conquests of civilization. Certainly we gazed at those in the consulate with feelings of mingled respect and tenderness. For six days, besides, we had eaten nothing but preserved fruit, dried and heated in



## A Week at Ispahan

the sun, and sardines whose oil had grown rancid in a temperature of 108° F. Dog-tired, we had nevertheless been obliged to wait upon ourselves and wash our own plates in the stream at our side. Now deferential servants brought us perfumed tea, slices of lemon, and ices. In our bedrooms, moreover, we found washstands, and close by baths, admirably installed, with hot and cold water. We were bruised with the wooden seats of the diligence, and we had slept altogether for about six hours in three days. It was natural enough, therefore, that when, after a bath and a change of clothes, we lay under some trees in the garden and breathed the fragrance of all the roses of Ispahan into our nostrils, it seemed to us that we had definitely attained paradise.

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As the evening drew in a delicious coolness passed through the garden. Some of the great dogs, which formerly so frightened Pierre Loti, ran about it, but dazed with weariness and excitement, we never even took any notice of them. Quite early we retired to sleep in our faithful camp-beds, the Russian Consulate having none to offer us. In Persia, and indeed in all the East, Jesus Christ's remark to the paralytic—"Take up thy bed and walk"—is understood at once as a natural statement. Next day we determined to indulge ourselves, and the real indulgence for us at the moment consisted in utter idleness. Instead of rushing about the town we

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

stayed in the consulate garden, revelling in the shade of some plantain trees, round the trunks of which grew great bushes of crimson roses. We were still almost torpid with the strain of the last six days. Our one desire was never to have to move again, and we lay in the midst of the roses, repeating softly, "We have got to Ispahan—we have got to Ispahan." The atmosphere here was even more crisp and fresh in the morning than at Teheran, for Ispahan enjoys about the same altitude as St. Moritz.

No noise from the town reached to us. Only the dogs ran about among the bushes, some Persian would pass by, or the old man who looked after the *hammam* went to throw some wood into the oven.

The garden was full of straight paths, young trees, and an infinite variety of roses—black, purple, white—all in the last moment of their flowering. Eight days later, and the splendour of the garden would have been over.

Aimé, meanwhile, was enjoying to the full the hospitality offered to us. He said to me, "I have had tea, wine, every sort of thing to eat, as well as ices, and I went to sleep under a table." Unfortunately his appearance was anything but a credit to us, and was wholly out of keeping with the select elegance of the consulate garden. His Persian coat had been in holes when we started, and the journey had completed its destruction. One sleeve was

## A Week at Ispahan

torn half off from the shoulder, his knees were showing through his cotton trousers, and one of his boots (the other was only kept on by means of string) had been left in the desert. His whole appearance, in fact, suggested nothing so much as that of a beggar who had managed to creep unnoticed into the palace. Feeling that he lowered our prestige in the servants' hall, we sent him to the bazaar to buy an entire new suit, and more especially a pair of the *guivets*, or white shoes, for which Ispahan is noted, and which apparently are the acme of good form in Persian footgear.

He returned with a large parcel and a yet larger bill. Next day I met him still in rags, and still dragging his solitary boot after him, while the other foot went bare. I sent him at once to change. He disappeared and was seen no more that day. Next morning, and for all the mornings of our stay, the same story repeated itself. Aimé refused to wear his new clothes, and we continued to be humiliated by a servant literally in tatters. At last, on the day of our departure, I asked him why he had persistently refused to wear the clothes we had bought for him.

"Oh, Monsieur," he answered with his drawling intonation, "what was the good? I know nobody here. I am keeping them for Teheran, where everybody knows me."

. . . . .

In the afternoon, the day after our arrival, we

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

went formally to present our respects to Zil-es-Sultan (shadow of the sovereign), through whose kindness we had made such an imposing entry into Ispahan.

Zil-es-Sultan is the Shah's elder brother, but not being the son of a legitimate wife could not succeed his father. This was a misfortune for Persia, as he is well educated, energetic, and very intelligent, though certainly he has a little of the temper of the tyrants of the Middle Ages, and stories are told of him which would delight the ears of Stendhal. Zil-es-Sultan favours an English alliance as being less dangerous for Persia than any friendship with Russia. He is a subscriber both to "The Times" and "Le Temps," having the news translated for him by his sons, who are pleasant and accomplished young fellows with a French tutor to look after them.

We were received in the summer palace, and passed through a garden full of young trees, narrow paths, and of bluey-green pools bordered by irises. We were presented by the Russian *chargé d'affaires*, and sat in a circle in a narrow room furnished in the European fashion, and with open windows on either side. The two young princes, Bahram Mirza \* and Akhbar Mirza, acted as interpreters, and the usual preliminary compliments having been exchanged, conversation became frank and interesting. Zil-es-Sultan, though he had at that time never been

\* *Mirza* is a title taken by any scholar, but when following a name signifies a prince.—*Trans.*

## A Week at Ispahan

out of Persia, was well informed upon the subject of European politics. He was perfectly aware how many millions we had lent Russia, and told us little anecdotes about our own statesmen. He even referred to "the famous Monsieur Combes." Monsieur Combes' glory was evidently world-wide, though, as a matter of fact, there were strong personal reasons why Persian statesmen should interest themselves in the anti-clerical campaign of "little Father Combes." For the only power in Persia opposed to the nominally absolute power of the Shah is that of the priests, or *mullahs*. The hold of the *mullah* over a people childishly credulous, absolutely ignorant, and passionately fanatical, whose conceptions even of the boundaries separating the real from the supernatural is almost non-existent, is naturally unlimited. Even enlightened Persians and men who had rubbed shoulders constantly with Europeans, said to me, "Our religion orders us to kill the Babis." Consequently the Government is obliged to treat with the *mullahs* as an equal power. Endless negotiations, for instance, took place with them before the Shah's last loan from Russia was permitted. Intelligent Persian statesmen fear them considerably, and Zil-es-Sultan remarked to us—"We need a Monsieur Combes here, to bring our *mullahs* to reason."

Zil-es-Sultan then spoke in the highest terms of France, which he hoped to visit the following winter. We exchanged courtesies, and in the course of them

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

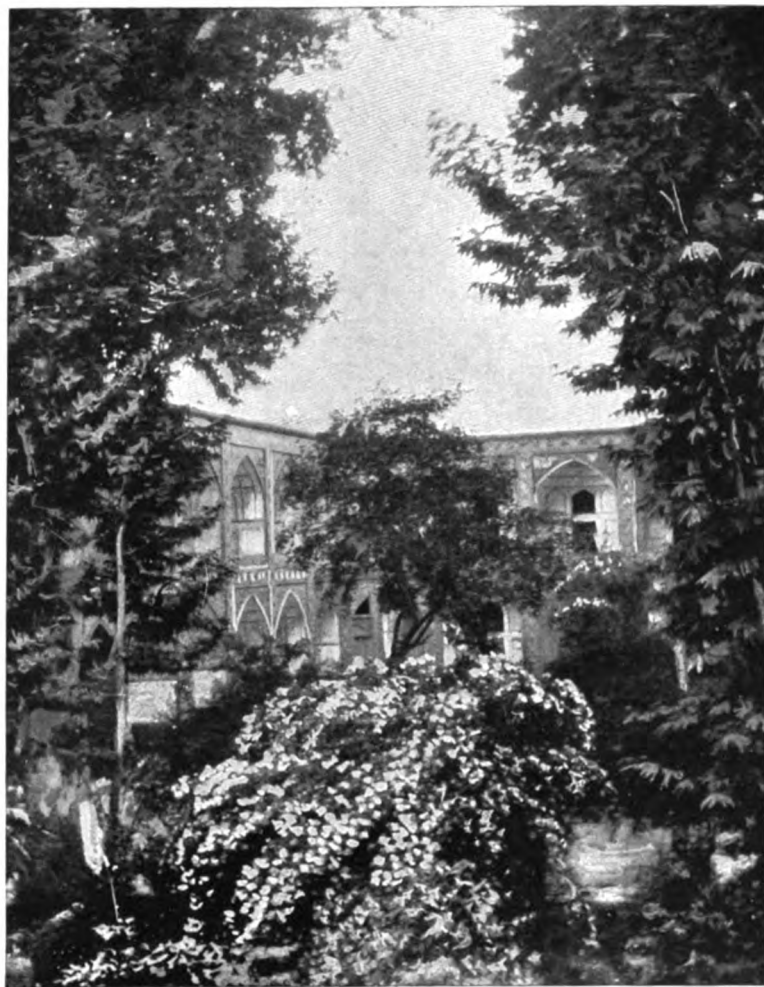
he said to me, "Your feet upon my eyes, as we say in Persia."

Here our party had some difficulty in preserving gravity, for I was wearing at the moment a pair of American boots, nailed and double soled, and weighing at the least more than two pounds each. They had been the butt of everybody when I started in the asphalted streets of Bucharest, though revenge had come when we reached the awful soil in Bessarabia, the thick mud of Mingrelia, the broken-up streets of Caucasian cities, and finally the rocks of Iran. They had seen the death of all their elegant comrades, and, intact and sturdy, had now come to tread the beautiful carpets of Zil-es-Sultan. But at the thought of planting their aggressive and colossal surfaces upon his Highness's countenance gravity had some difficulty in maintaining itself, and all of us experienced an instant's struggle not to smile broadly in the royal presence.

After tea, ices, and coffee, we left in the state carriages which had been placed at our disposal.

. . . . .

Crossing Ispahan on our return, we passed through the magnificent avenue which leads to the bridge built by one of the generals of Shah Abbas. The road is lined by old plane trees, and by fields of roses, wheat, and rye, for Ispahan is not what she was, and flowers have grown where once there stood great palaces and houses. Persians on pretty, thick-set horses



ISPAHAN. THE MEDRESSEH GARDENS

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## A Week at Ispahan

passed us continually, a vivid-coloured sash showing under their outer cloaks. Donkeys also kicked up the heavy dust as they trotted up and down the avenue, while some veiled women with children walked languidly back from the gardens. On the horizon the bare mountains were bathed seemingly in liquid gold.

Presently we arrived at the Medresseh, the old school of theology, now a promenade for the people of Ispahan. I have seen few more beautiful spots, or few where, among the flowers, one would prefer to philosophize in the manner of the ancients upon the questions of life and the hereafter. We reached it through a gate ornamented with old chased silver plates of exquisite design, which led into a small garden surrounded by buildings. There were plane trees, with their scabby barks, time-honoured elms, and huge banks of wild roses, forming one great white and perfumed vision. In the middle of the garden, reached by going down a few steps, flowed a stream whose waters, as are all those of the town, were absolutely the colour of jade. This colour is, indeed, indissolubly associated for me with every memory of Ispahan.

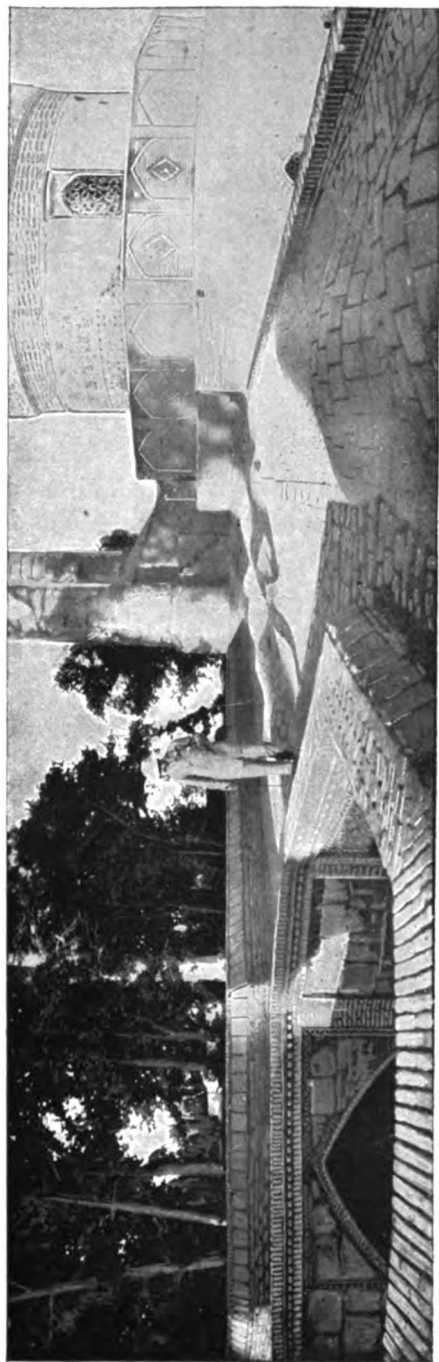
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The buildings, dating back to 1710, are two-storied, with Gothic niches in front, covered with blue enamelled tiles free and bold in design. Formerly students lived in little rooms built above the

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

recessed archways, but now both school and mosque have been abandoned. Nevertheless they would not let us go into the latter, and we were obliged to rest content with gazing at its immense portico, which seemed to us to sleep mysteriously in the soft blue shadows which overhung it. Above the trees its cupola, solid but beautiful, rose to the sky. Both cupola and minarets are covered with enamelled tiles in enormous arabesques, but they all looked as if attacked by some disease, so many were the tiles which had fallen away. All the old buildings in Ispahan are the same, no tile ever appears to be replaced if once broken, and in a dozen years or so nothing will be left of the beautiful blue and arabesque-covered exteriors, whose brilliant surfaces now seem so joyous among the green foliage of Ispahan. We picked up a few fragments of the tiles which were lying on the ground, and which we have kept in memory of the Medresseh, and of the early eighteenth-century art in Persia.

Then we walked through the recessed archways and went over the rooms formerly used by masters and scholars. Afterwards refreshments were served for us in the garden, but the crowd was getting both considerable and inconvenient, as, not only were we strangers and Christians, but we had two young and unveiled women with us. The Cossacks who accompanied us gently pushed them away, and they returned once more to their previous talks by the jade-coloured river—where the roses flower so freely



ISPAHAN. THE ROOF OF THE MEDRESSEH

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## A Week at Ispahan

—or to the smoke which filled the intervals between their cups of tea or coffee.

Next morning the sellers of antiques, warned of our arrival, came to see us. One of them brought letters from Pierre Loti, Gervais, Courtellemont, Morgan, and other travellers to Ispahan, but these seemed the sum total of his possessions, for during the eight days we remained in Ispahan he brought us nothing else of the slightest interest.

Nothing to me, however, was more exciting than the daily encounters with these *dellals*. There were about eight of them, and so intent was my longing to find some genuine treasure—a *reflet métallique* vase of the thirteenth century, an old bronze of Ispahan, a bit of carpet representing the hunting expeditions of Shah Abbas, or a miniature of the sixteenth century—that I generally rose at seven in order to interview them. While looking at things spread out for me one by one on a carpet, I breakfasted under the shade of a plantain. As I ate I would take up one thing after another, almost immediately putting the majority of them down again, as they would be both modern and valueless. Every now and then, however, one's eyes would be caught by something better—a piece of old Cashmere with great sprays of flowers on it, a square of silk worked elaborately in silver, or some velvet whose gold palm-leaf design had grown mellow with antiquity. These, carelessly, and without even asking the

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price, I put on one side, while on one occasion I had the joy of seeing the *dellal* draw from beneath his robe some exquisite little cups, as pretty, fine, diversely decorated, and as precious as some pieces of our own old Sèvres china. My heart beat at the sight of them, but I said carelessly—

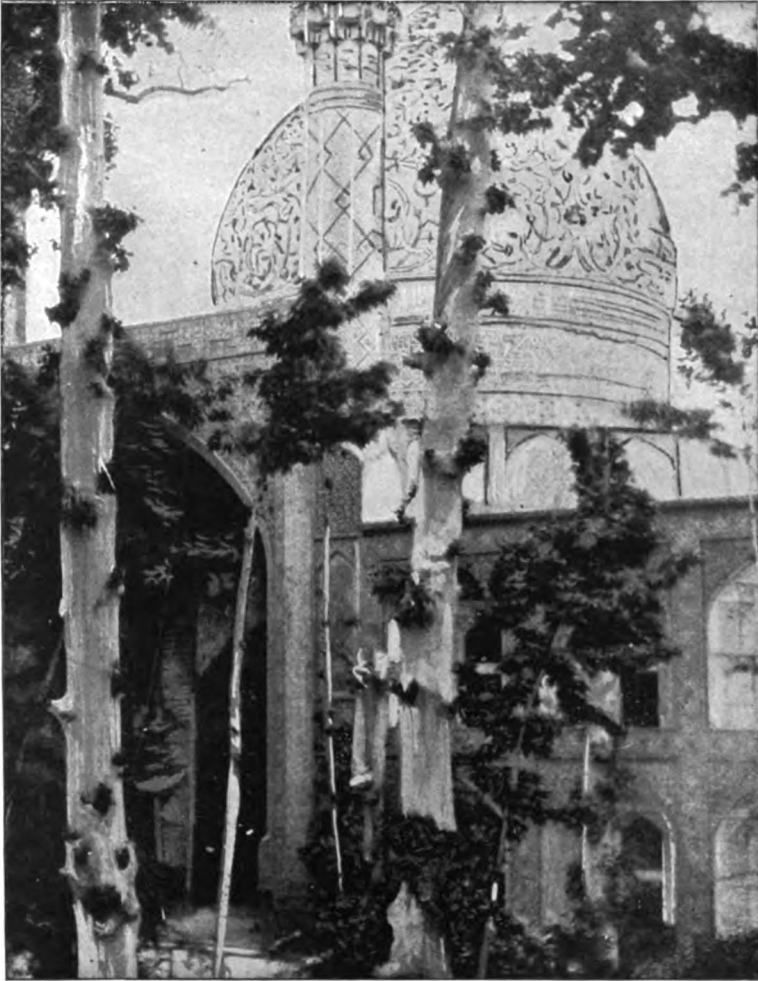
“*Tchande ?*” (How much ?)

The henna-dyed fingers were raised in a gesture of deprecation. These were nothing, my friend the merchant would make me a present of them for a few krans each. I concluded the bargain by getting them for one kran each, on the condition that the man brought me all those he could lay his hands upon. Unfortunately there were not many to be had, though I did get about two dozen, while the rest of the party also bought a certain number.

That same day I also purchased a piece of embroidered silk having the famous design of a parrot upon a spray of foliage, while its colour was of a pink so soft and yet so deep that I have never seen anything like it. I took besides a rather mutilated white china elephant, some cups, two pieces of embroidery, and a blue pot with a neck ornamented in copper, such as one saw at the druggists' stores in the bazaar.

For the least purchase bargaining was interminable. The morning, in fact, slipped by deliciously while one was trying to get for one toman what the merchants asked ten for at least.

That same day was my birthday. Who would



ISPAHAN. THE MEDRESSEH GARDENS

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ever have said I should spend a birthday at Ispahan? All the morning there was a sense of suppressed excitement, and at noon I was called and solemnly crowned with roses by the two ladies, while the Princess Bibesco read a poem written in my honour, dwelling upon the sufferings we had all endured in the desert in order to reach our present earthly paradise of Ispahan.

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Towards four in the afternoon we drove to see the palaces of the Medresseh quarter. First of all we went to the Eight Paradises, an uninteresting building of the seventeenth century, set in a perfectly delightful garden, with rows of paths bordered by plantains, whose lower branches have been cut off, making the effect of the consequent long white stems very striking. There were also pools of bluey-green water, surrounded by royal irises. In the evening we went to the Royal Square—Meidan-i-Shah. This is one of the biggest squares in the world, and one of the most famous. It was designed under Shah Abbas at the end of the sixteenth century. Shah Abbas loved big spaces and big buildings, and the Meidan-i-Shah is a rectangle, surrounded by two-storied buildings, with horse-shoe-shaped arcades on the ground-floor. These project from a stuccoed white wall, and under each archway is a little door leading to a narrow terrace. A pavement runs alongside the buildings, then a tiled ditch filled with water, after which comes a

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platform, a row of trees, and a second water-way. The middle of the square is empty. On the south-west stands the colossal entrance to the bazaars, which extend both to the north and to the east. In the centre of the south-east pavement is the palace of Ali-Kapi, with its slightly raised veranda, upon which the king used to receive the ambassadors, and from which he would watch the polo matches played in the square below.

Opposite to Ali-Kapi Palace is a mosque—not the Djuma Mosque, as supposed by Pierre Loti, but that of the Sheikh Lutfallah. It is the only one in Ispahan whose enamelled cupola has a coffee-coloured ground with arabesques in black.

Opposite the bazaar is the royal mosque, the Musjid-i-Shah, whose blue cupola and minarets seem to soar to the sky. It is the finest mosque in Ispahan, and one of the most important of the Mussulman world. It is entirely covered in enamelled plaques, of beautiful design and lettering, and is like a symphony in many shades of blue. The inner court is tiled, and the cupola and minarets have a flowing design very delicately and freely interlaced. As we saw it, the sun, then near the horizon, fell upon the dome, and made it gleam with a sort of soft intensity.

We drew near the door, but it was the hour of Muezzin, when the “faithful” are called to evening prayers, and as we approached the crowd drew together and barred the way for us. Even to gaze

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was a sacrilege, and in a cloud of dust we recrossed the bazaars, lit up for the evening, and returned to the Russian Consulate.

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Next day the *dellals* brought some beautiful carpets, which they informed us were old, but which in reality had been made about fifty years ago. Nothing is more difficult to find in Persia than genuine sixteenth-century pieces. Ispahan, however, has always been noted for its carpets, and one of those brought was extraordinarily fine, with a handsome border surrounding an orange-coloured square, so warm in tone it seemed actually to give out light from its surface. He showed others called old, which were nothing but bad copies made in the aniline dyes which have latterly nearly ruined the Persian carpet trade. The colours having faded in the sun, and the carpets being eaten up with dust, it is natural at first to believe that the dullness of colour is due to dirt, and when cleaned the thing will regain all its original brightness, but in separating the pile a little it is easy to see that the carpet has been discoloured by the sun, and has never known honest vegetable colouring at all. I bought, however, a charming piece of old embroidery, some cups, and some eighteenth-century lacquer, wonderfully rich and deep in tone. The unique treasure, however, still remained undiscovered.

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The days were already becoming very hot. By ten o'clock to venture out was practically impossible. We lunched at one, and spent the early part of the afternoon behind closed shutters in the drawing-room, smoking, talking, playing the piano, and occasionally dozing a little. At four the Sultan's carriages would be at the door, and we went for a drive, either to see some famous gardens, or the melancholy Julfa on the other side of the river.

As we started beggars were always waiting for us at the consulate gateway. One of them, a blind boy of about sixteen, carried a stick in one hand, and with the other leant on the shoulder of a small child. He carried his head like the blind men in Breughal the elder's pictures in the Louvre; but wherever we went, over ditches, stones, and rubbish heaps, this beggar with the boy ran after us. At every street corner, at every place or garden we visited, there he was, with his upturned head, begging for alms, and wherever we went he followed running behind. On the second day we visited the Hall of Forty Columns, built by Shah Abbas, and containing inside some fine frescoes representing hunting scenes, games, and dances. Outside, the pavilion is flanked by a portico supported by forty wooden columns. This was the throne-room, in which Shah Abbas would show himself to his people. The portico is much the same as that of Darius at the Apadana of Susa. For in Iran architectural forms are of extraordinarily long duration, and one

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would imagine architecture much a question of climate, if one did not remember how two such totally opposed styles as the Gothic and the Neo-classical have flourished at different periods under the same grey skies in France. Before the palace is a rectangular piece of water, in whose jade-coloured depths the forty columns are tremulously repeated. Alabaster statues border the water, and the whole building is set round with cut trees, that finally mingle with the plantains shading its neighbour the Eight Paradises.

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From here we passed to the Champs Elysées of Ispahan, the Chehar-Bagh Avenue, and came to the famous bridge built by a general of Shah Abbas, over the Zendeh-Rud. The bridge has two raised galleries for pedestrians, a carriage-road in the middle, and underneath another road for pedestrians. It is a magnificent structure, which in the old days connected the Chehar-Bagh quarter, the Palace of the Forty Columns, the Eight Paradises, and our dear Medresseh, with a second avenue on the other side of the river, in which all the old princes and nobles once had their residences. This second avenue is gone, Ispahan scarcely surviving the Afghan invasions of 1722, when nearly all the town was devastated. All that is left are some shady gardens, some poplars, plantains, roses, and some rubbish heaps, marking the place of former palaces now overgrown with fields of white poppies, with

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bluish rye, and delicate oats, the whole, seen against the arid and sharp-peaked mountains, making up one of the saddest and most beautiful scenes imaginable.

To the right sleeps Julfa, the Armenian city with its narrow streets and formidable doorways, the people having always been obliged to strenuously defend themselves against the attacks of their fanatical neighbours. It was Shah Abbas who conceived the extraordinary idea of transplanting into the heart of his kingdom, and at the very door as it were of his capital, several thousand Armenian families, which he took from an Armenian town on the shores of the Arax, called Julfa. They have been terribly persecuted, all that remain at the present day being about two thousand people, and the surprise of finding this dead and Christian city in the depths of Persia, and of seeing young girls, dressed Georgian fashion, standing in the doorways, is very great, when one's eyes have once grown accustomed to the easternism of Ispahan. Here the girls wear no veils, but heavy plaits of hair falling over their shoulders, while they play the same games that we as children played in our own country.

The cathedral of Julfa dates from the seventeenth century. It is full of treasures—mosaics, mural paintings, enamelled plaques, mingling together with an exquisite unexpectedness of beauty, the

## A Week at Ispahan

delicate Persian art of the Shah Abbas period with the Christian memories of degenerate Byzantine art which the Armenians brought with them from their original country. The priest also showed us some of the valuable manuscripts with which the library is enriched, after which we drove back in the dusk to dine with his Highness Zil-es-Sultan.

The question of clothes had been anything but easy to settle. In the one portmanteau which we had been allowed each from Teheran, there had only been room for linen, toilet necessities, and a change of footgear. The ingenious Aimé himself washed and ironed our two ladies' blouses, and with red roses they did passably well. I may as well mention here, however, that roses in Ispahan are called the roses of Shiraz, and not of Ispahan at all. Among the men of the party only two had black coats, while one of them had only a silk night-shirt as all the change he could effect. With this he wore a big washing tie, a khaki waistcoat, faded grey trousers, and a pair of tennis shoes now in holes. Personally I was in knickerbockers and stockings, but—oh, pride!—possessed a shirt and immaculate collar and cuffs. As we passed the guard on our arrival we tried to put into our bearing all the dignity our appearances lacked. But I shall never forget the court curtseys of our two ladies in their short walking skirts, or the wonderful deep blue turquoise, big as a hen's egg, which our host wore, surrounded by diamonds, on his chest. During

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the dinner an orchestra, placed under the trees, played some strange and melancholy music, while a flute sang in the night the sorrows of some love-tormented heart.

Next day the young princes took us to see the shaking minarets of an abandoned mosque. There was nothing at first sight peculiar about them, but a man actually got up into one of them and shook the slender turret, when the minaret visibly moved. One of these days it will fall down, along with the unfortunate man who shakes it. In the abandoned mosque itself is now an infant school. The master, a young man with a long stick, stood in the middle of his scholars, who were seated in circles on the floor. Their ages ranged from eight to ten years, and all had Korans on their laps, from which they chanted the lesson, following the text with their fingers, and balancing their bodies backwards and forwards all the time, to imitate the movement of the prophet on the back of his camel. It was comic enough to see. If one of them made a mistake, or paused in the necessary oscillation, the master rapped him across the knuckles with his stick, not very hard apparently, and more by way of warning than punishment.

In the more abandoned and ruined parts of Ispahan to drive was impossible, and we walked, threading our way through narrow mud-walled streets. In the middle ran a stream, with trees on the edges, whose branches met those planted within



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the walls of the gardens on each side. Finally we reached a summer pavilion belonging to the young princes, where we had refreshments. One of them spoke of a coming journey to Europe, and said, "When I hear the word Paris, my heart trembles with excitement."

That day to our deep regret the two Phérékydes were obliged to leave us, having to be in Roumania by a certain fixed date. For the rest of us, we were still in the mood when we wanted to make no plans whatsoever. It had cost us too dearly to get to Ispahan. Once there, all we desired was to stay indefinitely, and enjoy a state of mild mental intoxication. All idea of another journey and the awful sufferings we must re-experience, prostrated us merely to think of. Still, some time even we must leave the city of roses, and we fixed our departure for Wednesday afternoon, June the third. George Bibesco also telegraphed to Keller to bring the Mercédès as far as Kum, so that we should thus avoid the misery of the last stage of ninety odd miles, which, in a Persian diligence, had taken us twenty-five hours to cover.

Before taking leave of our friends we walked, against the rules of etiquette, in the bazaars of Ispahan. These are immense, covering two and a half miles, though a part of them was abandoned after the Afghan invasions. Following upon the quiet of the rest of the town their noise and anima-

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tion came as a striking contrast, for the streets of Ispahan are only alleys between two high mud walls, without a single window or opening to be seen—merely here and there a low narrow doorway, always impenetrably closed. The ground is thickly coated with dust, the streets are rarely straight, and never have they got any name. To find one's way a sense of locality is absolutely imperative. A stream, bordered by trees, usually runs in the middle of the road, and a carriage has to drive with infinite precaution, though, as a matter of fact, nobody but us would have thought of driving through the streets of Ispahan. The sense of ruin is everywhere—here a wall is falling down, there a palace is in ruins, a little further a deserted mosque is skirted. Such is Ispahan, which from having at one time a population of one million is now reduced to barely one hundred thousand inhabitants.

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An extraordinary and formidable activity is concentrated in the bazaars. They are narrow and covered with little cupolated arches. As at Teheran, or for that matter in all Persian bazaars, the darkness seems at first absolute in them. It is only after a little while that one's eyes grow accustomed to the gloom. In this gloom, however, a good deal of work is done.

In the iron and copper workers' quarters the noise was almost deafening. It has been stated that necessity creates the organ. I wish distin-

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guished anthropologists (they are all that) would measure the drum of the Ispahan coppersmiths. I am convinced that it would immediately be proved that these organs are some ten millimetres thicker than mine, and if they are not, I declare that they ought to give up their cadenced kettle-tapping.

Escorted by a Russian Cossack and a *ghoulam* (courier) from the consulate, we walked in the shade of the bazaar. There was a round hole in the top of the vaulted roof, through which streamed a thin column of light, so full of dust that it seemed like a thick, luminous, opaque stick reaching to the ground. We went through the bazaar, which was filled with hundreds of carpets brought by the caravans from the neighbouring provinces and from the country round—from Kerman, Yezd, and Hamadan, Baluchistan and Afghanistan. Besides carpets there were, cheek by jowl with English cottons, silk from Kashan, velvets from Resht, and delicate cashmere veils, covered with a bold design of flowers. These are actually made in the bazaar, the pattern being stamped by hand, and then dyed piece by piece with genuine vegetable dyes. It is these latter dyes which constitute the real beauty of the Persian cashmeres, and their superiority over the imitations which are now turned out by thousands in Europe.

The potters sat crouching over their pots, which are all of the same-coloured blue, and of which the outlines are still tolerably good. There were also saddlers, making the beautiful Persian harness for

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horses, donkeys, and for my friends the camels. From that we passed to the druggists at work, surrounded by their magnificent old blue-and-white bellied jars, some of which were Persian, others Chinese. But the smell of the drugs, mingling with that which came from a neighbouring cook-shop, where a horrible stew was in course of preparation, caused us to take flight.

For that matter we stopped nowhere, nor did the merchants offer us their goods. They sat huddled in front of their shops, seeming to make it a point of honour not even to see us. Well-known business men and good Mussulmans, they were above taking any notice of Christians. Their indifference was not shared by the minor personalities of the bazaar, by the apprentices, workmen, and by the *loutis*, who represent the Persian unemployed. These jostled us incessantly. Our Cossack vainly showed his *nagaiika* and pushed them back; he could not succeed in keeping them off, though their curiosity was anything but friendly. Presently a few stones hit us in the back; at first we thought that they were little falling fragments of rubbish detached from the roof, but we soon realized that they were stones thrown deliberately at us. We turned round and found that a compact and hostile crowd was following in our wake.

Fortunately we had reached the goal of our expedition—the famous Djuma, or Friday Mosque, built in the eighth century. But from the bazaar

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we could only see the outer door, which is totally without interest. Our *ghoulam*, however, found a native in a narrow side street who consented to let us view it from his terrace. We were therefore taken into a little court, the door being immediately closed behind us. We climbed a narrow, dark, spiral stairway, with deep-worn steps, which opened out upon a terrace overlooking the court of the mosque. This is fairly large, with a tank for ablutions in the middle, fronting the great arch of the central doorway. The walls are covered with brown enamelled tiles, but we were too far away to distinguish any details of ornamentation.

When we came down again the little street was filled with people, none too pleased, apparently, at the manner in which we had satisfied our idle curiosity. We retraced our steps across the bazaar, followed by the crowd, and more stones were thrown at us. For a moment we were uncertain what to do. Only dire extremity would have induced us to fight with the people of Ispahan, and we therefore hurried as fast as we could back to the consulate. Our Cossack waved his *nagaïka*, pushed back the more audacious among the crowd, and we walked with dignity, if with some rapidity, to get out of the interminable colonnades of the bazaar, where personally we experienced anything but the good-natured indifference which Gobineau attributes to the Persians. Stones, happily not large, continued to be flung at us, and one of our two ladies was hit

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in the back with a stick—a fact, however, of which she was so proud, that she said she would not have gone without the experience for anything in the world. At last we got out of the bazaar and reached the consulate—a circumstance on the whole we had every reason to be thankful for.

The landau ordered by the Phérékydes was to have been ready at three, but it did not arrive till five o'clock, and when Phérékyde began to inspect the carriage, he discovered one of the back wheels oscillated somewhat alarmingly. He shook it, and the thing immediately fell off the axle. This made him furious ; he took a whip, seized hold of the postmaster, and gave him a severe thrashing, which the other accepted as the most natural thing in the world. Truly I have seldom seen anything more repugnant than the sight of this man, who neither ran away nor resisted, but allowed himself to be beaten without uttering a word. Moreover he was a *seyid*, as one could see by his magnificent green robes, notwithstanding which the crowd looked on at the thrashing with the most undisturbed curiosity.

His anger exhausted, Phérékyde sent for a wheelwright, who made a new nut. Finally, about seven o'clock, the landau was ready, and we said good-bye to our friends, who were starting once more for a second journey across the desert.

At eight o'clock the rest of us sat down to dinner, talking chiefly of the couple who had just left us,

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and speculating as to what adventures they were by now probably experiencing. At a quarter to nine, just as we were finishing dinner, the door of the dining-room opened—and who should walk in but the two people we had seen off less than two hours ago. Apparently it had taken them an hour to reach the gates of Ispahan, and just as they got there one of the wheels of the carriage had come off. At this they had mounted the two carriage horses and ridden straight back to us. Phérékyde was in a very anxious state of mind, fearing that they might lose the boat on June the 11th at Enzeli. Monsieur Tcherkine, however, sent to the postmaster, and another carriage was promised for five o'clock next morning, whereupon we started playing the maddest charades, all representing scenes from our recent journey in Persia.

Previous to the departure of the Phérékydes a Russian financial agent had told me that while passing through Kashan he had been offered a *reflet métallique* for a hundred tomans. Now at Kashan, as at Veramin, there is a thirteenth-century mosque of the Mongolian period, so, hoping that it might really prove to be a genuine specimen, I sent a note by the Phérékydes asking the English head of the telegraph office if he could hunt me out this treasure and have it ready for me by the following Sunday, when we should be stopping at Kashan on our

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homeward journey. Curiously enough, after lunch that same day I had a second artistic excitement, as a merchant whom I had never seen before brought me about fifty miniatures. Forty of them were valueless, but I picked out eight which were charming, and of these eight four belonged to the sixteenth century, and were typical of the finest art of the Shah Abbas period. I launched at once upon the usual bargaining, but the merchant, who had a strong face and a determined chin, refused to make any reduction in price, in spite of the fact that it was an enormous one for Ispahan. I ended by offering the half of what he asked, though a tenth is usually accepted. All the other merchants tried to persuade him to be satisfied with my offer, and eventually, one of them assuring me that I should have the miniatures at my own price, I went to my room to fetch the money. When I came back the merchant once more refused any reduction, and finally, after some useless discussion, I lost my temper and dismissed him. I had no sooner done so than I bitterly regretted the action. To run across an exquisite bit of sixteenth-century work, and then to lose it purely through a lack of patience, was simply maddening. Besides, even if I had paid three times the sum he wanted I should still have been well below its genuine value. I wondered if the stubborn dealer would come back, and tried to comfort myself with the knowledge that at any rate the other merchants knew his address, and if the



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worst came to the worst I could go to him myself and pay the price demanded.

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It was about this period of our stay that Aimé brought us three little Persian kittens, like nothing so much as soft balls of long and lovely fur. One of them was quite white, and was christened at once Shah Abbas. Another, entirely brown, we called Bruin, because, spitting and growling all the time, he seized a piece of meat and retired fiercely into a corner to eat it. Emmanuel Bibesco took the third, and, paradoxically enough, insisted upon an English name for the Persian creature. We determined to take all three with us to Europe, and sent Aimé to get some baskets that they could travel in.

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A day or two later we were informed at the consulate that the *mullah* of the Djuma Mosque sent permission for us to come and see his sacred building. The fact was so extraordinary—no European being ever allowed to enter a Persian mosque—that we could hardly believe the information. The *mullah*, however, was apparently a man destitute of fanaticism, and of a wide and enlightened understanding, who had realized that our curiosity contained no hint of sacrilege, but sprang solely from the desire to see old and unique works of art. Consequently he sent to tell us that he would hold himself responsible for our safety while in his mosque. But

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—for apparently there was a but—we must come to an understanding with the governor of the town, in order that he might provide soldiers to protect us afterwards in the bazaars, the population of which was sure to be exasperated against us. Then we realized that we should never see the Djuma Mosque, for, on talking it over with the *chargé d'affaires*, the thing loomed instantly as impracticable, since the governor was not in the least likely to rouse the antagonism of the whole population, as well as that of all the *mullahs*; while, even if he did consent to lend us some soldiers, they would be the first to turn and attack us.

One morning, however, we went to the School of the Israelite Alliance. Ever since I had been in Persia I had been surprised and pleased to find how much French was spoken by the natives. At Teheran, if we got into any difficulties in the streets or bazaars, there was always some one in the crowd who could act as interpreter. And in the book-shops I had come across the same French grammar with which our own schooldays had been made so wearisome. Little had I thought in those days that the time would come when I should read the law of participles almost with tenderness; but then, who could have foreseen that I should do so in Persia, three thousand miles from the familiar haunts of one's own country?

Our first desire to see the Jewish school had come

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from a little *ghoulam* at the French Legation at Teheran, who acted as our guide, and who told us that he had learnt French at the Jewish school. But the days went by without our ever managing to see the school. Only when I learnt that there was a similar one at Ispahan, I at once asked permission of the director, M. Lahana, to go over it.

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In nearly all Persian towns there is a Jewish community, often of very remote origin ; that of Hamadan, formerly Ecbatana, dates back to the Babylonian captivity. And when one knows the isolation in which Jews in the East live, one can state fearlessly that no families in the world have a purer blood or a longer line of ancestors than the Israelites, or people of Hamadan. Living in the midst of a fanatical and hostile population, Jews in Persia are reduced to the last extremity of degradation. Nearly all trades are forbidden to them ; everything they touch is considered defiled. They cannot even live in the house of a Mussulman. There is very little justice in Persia for anybody—for the Jews there is none at all. Every possible exaction is practised on them ; nobody takes their part ; and they live in appalling poverty, while their moral and physical degradation is beyond description.

Family ties are very feeble among them, and the early age of marriages is their ruination. Little girls are married at eight and ten years old, and one

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frequently sees the tragic sight of a girl of eleven already carrying a child of her own in her arms. I was told of a Rabbi who at sixty-five married a girl of eight. As a rule the men marry at eighteen, and by the time their wives are fifteen have grown tired of them and divorced them, or taken another wife without so much as even troubling to get rid of the first.

At one time such a thing as schooling was non-existent. At the most a Rabbi would gather about thirty children about him and teach them to read. Of religion all they were taught were a few elementary practices. Moreover, owing to persecution and to a law ruling that a dead man's money should go to any member of his family, however distant, who might be a convert to Islam, apostasy was frequent. The Universal Jewish Alliance labours hard to alter this state of affairs, and the sequel will show what it has achieved in Ispahan.

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We drove to the school with the Russian *chargé d'affaires*, who, owing to the competition and rivalry existing between the various Israelite, Congregationalist, and Protestant schools, is, though the representative of an anti-Semitic nation, the protector of the Jews in Ispahan.

Having crossed the bazaars we reached the Jewish quarter. Here the streets are even narrower than those in the other parts of the city, and turn and

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twist and cross each other at different angles, until they form the most complicated of networks. The mounted Cossacks who preceded us, and who had already been several times to the schools, had the greatest difficulty in remembering their way.

As we passed, old men, women, and children gathered in the doorways to look at us. Their faces were thin, their noses aquiline, their eyes intense-looking. All were in rags. As for the houses, they consisted simply of mud walls forming one room without windows or furniture. They knew we were going to inspect the schools, and were proud to see the Cossacks and the Russian *chargé d'affaires* accompanying us. The matter would be discussed afterwards in the bazaars, and the Jewish prestige, small enough in all conscience, would temporarily rise a little.

The school, like all Persian dwellings, was hidden behind walls totally destitute of any opening in the front. Having passed through the door we came upon a series of one-storied buildings, grouped irregularly round three or four courts. In these buildings were 350 boys and 250 girls.

We visited the girls' classes first. Here little mites of seven years old were reading the fables of La Fontaine, while others were at history and arithmetic. I asked them several questions which they answered in French, with a curious guttural accent. There were also classes for sewing and embroidery.

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We then went to the boys' side. Their heads were clean-shaven, their eyes brilliant, but the type of their faces had nothing in common with the Jewish type as known in Europe. We spoke to them, asking them about the revolution and the emancipation of their co-religionists. I said to one of the most intelligent, "What would you like to do?"

"Go to Paris and study to be a schoolmaster," he replied.

In the workshops the children are taught a trade to enable them to earn a living on leaving school, for no Mussulman would take a Jew as an apprentice. It was even difficult to find a workman who would come and teach his trade at the school; in fact the Grand *Mullah* forbade it. Nevertheless the workshops were at last set going, and we saw the children at work making the delightful *guivets*, or fashionable footgear of Ispahan, also articles in iron, while others were busy at cabinet-making. Everything done in the workshops belongs to the master. In this fashion is the young Jewish generation being brought up to adopt an honourable trade, even the girls being taught to earn their own living. So extreme is the poverty of the children educated that the school is obliged not only to provide the midday meal, but actually to clothe them. There is a library from which they borrow books, and in the heart of immense and ruined Ispahan little

## A Week at Ispahan

Israelites spend their evenings charmed by the works of Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo.

Having visited the school we rested in M. Lahana's drawing-room and listened to his Persian experiences. From the day the school was founded the Jews felt that they had in their director a man who could help to defend their interests, and who would have access to the consulates and the Government. At last they were no longer sheep without a shepherd. The school, indeed, almost expressed to them a place of refuge, and in case of trouble they do actually take shelter there. The children themselves love the school. They find the material conditions in it better than those of their own homes, and a moral atmosphere infinitely superior. They are taught the value of a number of things hitherto unsuspected, and they become clean, careful of their persons and their clothes, and gradually even industrious. The school has completely put an end to the immoral custom of marrying girls at eight to ten years old, as they are kept there until they are fourteen or fifteen. When they leave it they all know a trade and have a good knowledge of housewifery.

So great is the superiority of the Jewish schools that, in spite of religious prohibition and the extreme contempt in which Jews are held, some of the best Mussulman families, to the great horror of the *mullahs*, send their children to attend the Israelite classes. These schools are managed by French people, and the education is all given in the French

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

language, thus bringing a touch of our civilization and thought into the closely-shut heart of Persia.

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In the afternoon of the same day we went to see the Ali-Kapi Palace. This ancient palace of Shah Abbas has been covered with a layer of plaster, beneath which in places one can still see the old frescoes. Under the doorway, on the ground-floor, there are still, in a central niche, two paintings belonging to the end of the sixteenth century, both of which represent a tall young woman dressed in simple floating draperies. The painting itself is bold, and at the same time finished and full of charm and subtlety. Curiously enough, one of the miniatures I had bought, on which is painted a young woman playing with a monkey, belong to the same period as the frescoes of the Ali-Kapi.

We went on to the higher terraces and gazed at Ispahan stretched out beneath us. At our feet was the large square, Meidan-i-Shah, where horsemen on small prancing white horses were riding backwards and forwards, and where little grey donkeys were being led in various directions. To our right was the intensely blue cupola of the royal mosque ; to our left the monumental entrance to the bazaar ; and straight in front the fawn and black arabesques of the Sheikh Lutfallah. Beyond were walls and walls of sun-dried bricks, terrace after terrace, and numbers of little cupolas belonging





CROSSING THE RIVER

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IN THE BAZAARS AT TEHERAN

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IN THE ALI-KAPI PALACE

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## A Week at Ispahan

to the bazaars and *hammams*. Everywhere—in the courtyards of the houses, in the middle of the streets—rose charming trees, poplars or planes, whose green was so rich that it came as a lovely touch of fresh and yet sombre colour given to the scene. In the distance stretched the old boundary wall of the city, which now shelters among its ruins fields of wheat and barley. The horizon, finally, is shut in by the sharply indented mountains which surround the plain of Ispahan. Walls and terraces were all equally bathed in sunlight, the hot brownness of the earth flinging into relief the vivid green of the foliage.

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We also revisited the Medresseh to say good-bye to the flowering sweetbriar, and to the jade-coloured streams flowing between the enamelled walls of the building. We wanted to see once more these beautiful spots which next day we were to leave for ever.

Then I personally took a carriage and drove out beyond the boundaries of the town, crossing the Ali Verdi Bridge, beneath which the river flows blue between the sandy banks on each side, and reflecting in its still waters the willows of its borders. I drove in the direction of Julfa. On the way some of the royal carriages passed me, also some harem ladies riding on mules led by negroes. One of the mules became frightened by the noise of the carriage, and its rider, startled, let her veil slip for an instant

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

from her face, showing me a pair of beautiful eyes and well-shaped eyebrows.

Presently the walls of Julfa stood on my right ; to the left fields of poppies and rye swayed lightly in the gentle breeze of evening. In gardens of closely planted poplars Persians were walking in couples, holding each other by the thumbs. The scene was full both of quietude and life, and steeped in indicible dignity. Gradually, moreover, the sun, sinking upon the horizon, bathed everything in warm and mellow lights. The much-vaunted sunset of Rome is feeble compared to that of Ispahan. Nothing, in fact, could really describe the intensity of the glowing light, the fluid quality of the amber tones, the extraordinary clarity and almost palpable appearance of the atmosphere of a June sunset in the high plateau of Iran. Gradually the shadows stretched into lines of violet, the mountains grew like rose-coloured velvet, and the blue of the cupolas seemed to quiver in the evening air, while close to the road the leaves of a poplar shivered and rustled like some live thing.

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But it was time for us to retrace our steps homewards. The agony of leaving Ispahan had weighed heavily on our spirits for days. The thought of losing what we had attained so arduously tore at our heart-strings—all the calm and voluptuous mornings among the roses and plane trees of the consulate, the midday rest when the sun was at its height, the

## A Week at Ispahan

evening outings among wonderful ruins or in the abandoned gardens of palaces no princess will ever again wake into liveliness, and the dazzling loveliness of the glittering star-covered nights. Now we had to leave all this and reface the awful journey across the desert, the suffocating heat of the closed vehicle, the ceaseless dust, the insufficient food eaten either in the unsatisfactory shade of a tree or the filth of a stable, the sleepless nights, perhaps in a barn literally infested with mice, the nerve-strain of the delays at each posting-house, and the incessant quarrelling with coachmen. And more than that, we had to reface all this unsustained by the knowledge that each day ahead held at least the unknown, that the fascination of the mysteriously unprobed was always in front of us. Now there was only the world waiting at the end of our torture.

Still, the start had to be made, and purchases that had hung fire for eight days were at last concluded and carefully packed up for us. The merchant with the fine miniatures had never come back, but I had bought from another of the *dellals* a few more little cups, the majority of which had been made at Ispahan during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by Chinese workmen, originally imported by Shah Abbas, but whose descendants had remained there for several generations. All these were added to the rest, and finally, at four o'clock on Wednesday, the 3rd of June, two landaus stood ready for us at the door of the consulate.

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

Fortunately this time real beds were placed in them, thanks to some mattresses we had had made by an old man who was the living image of Homer.

Monsieur Tcherkine, who had been so kind to us during our eight days' stay, accompanied us on horseback with all the Cossacks as far as the gates of the city. So did the English Vice-Consul, with eight magnificent Bengal Lancers. In this fashion we went for the last time through the populous bazaars and deserted streets of Ispahan, our escort only leaving us at some miles from the city. Then, our horses slowly trotting over the sand, we drew away from Ispahan, and went northwards to Teheran and Europe.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RETURN

NIGHT and day we travelled slowly, though almost without stopping, across the mountains and deserts, once more passing through the dead and dried-up scenery with which we were already familiar. We closed the landaus by day and opened them by night, lying all the time on our comfortable mattresses, save when we got down at the post-houses, where we were invariably delayed two or three hours, owing to the fact that some Bakhtiari princes had preceded us and taken all the horses. On the second night of our return journey I lay half asleep in the open landau with the dark dome of a sky literally covered in golden stars above me, and with the velvety air coming like a caress across my face. Every time I opened my eyes I saw the same violet night and burning stars, while I could hear all the time a sad and rhythmic song, hovering perpetually about two notes, which seemed to come to me from some considerable distance. Who, I wondered, could be singing in the desert? It was like a voice hung between heaven and earth, but I was stupid with weariness and

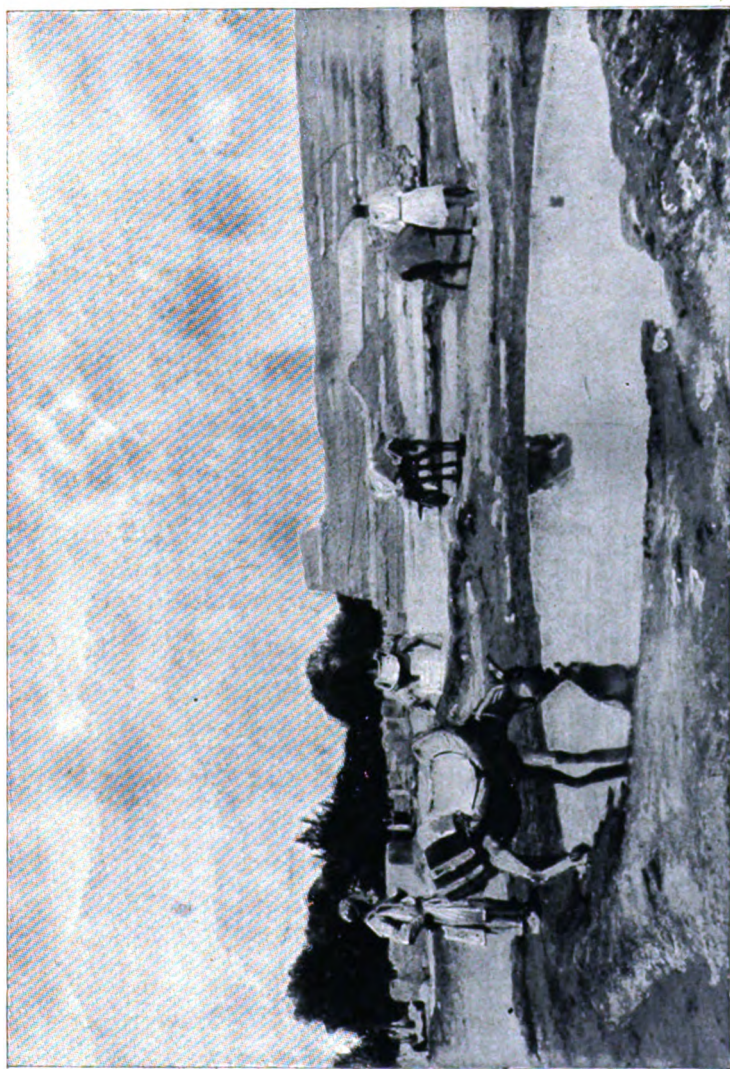
## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

took it almost as a dream. Suddenly the noise of quarrelling woke me altogether. The man who had been singing his sorrows to the night was a post-boy, bringing some horses back to the posting-station. Our own had already taken us over thirty miles, and were likely soon to leave us stranded as usual in the desert. Consequently we wanted a fresh relay, and the boy refusing to give them up, Aimé was resorting to blows. Things are managed after this fashion in Persia, and having learnt the cause of the disturbance I merely returned to the dreams it had interrupted.

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At the next post-house we learnt that our friends the Phérékydes had experienced another unpleasant adventure. In the middle of the desert one of their wheels had broken, and in the broiling heat of midday they had had to walk just on four miles across the sands to reach the *chapar khaneh*. There they had been obliged to wait for thirty-six hours, while the wheel was being mended in the little town of Natanz, twenty miles away. Consequently they were now barely a day ahead of us. On Sunday, 8th of June, at eight o'clock in the morning, we arrived at Gez, the last posting-station before Kashan, from which we were separated by the desert in which we had been stranded on our outward journey. At Gez there were no horses. We decided therefore, in spite of the protests of the drivers, to keep on those we had wrested from the post-boy on the previous





A PERSIAN VILLAGE NEAR NATANZ

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## The Return

night. They were consequently taken out to be rubbed down, fed, and to have an hour's rest. While this was going on we seized the opportunity to go and bathe in a stream a little distance from the station, but no sooner were our backs turned than the coachmen each jumped on to a horse and made off with the whole eight across the desert. In spite of our fury there was nothing left to do but to wait for a further relay of horses arriving from Kashan, which might occur in an hour or not until the evening. While we anxiously scrutinized the horizon a caravan slowly arrived on the scene. It was that of a Persian travelling with his wife and servants, all of them mounted on mules and donkeys. The husband was a small, dried-up looking little man, solidly built, and handsomely bearded, who wore the green sash of the *seyids*. Without so much as looking at us he led his *smalah* a little distance to some willows by the side of the stream, and a few minutes later a woman's heart-rending screams broke upon our ears. We asked what was the matter, to learn that the husband, no sooner arrived at a stopping-place, had started conscientiously chastising one of his wives. In such fashion, as I said before, are things managed in Persia. At ten o'clock eight horses finally arrived at the post-house. After losing another hour while they were being fed, we started for Kashan, doing the journey in the most intense heat we had yet experienced. We simply lay prostrated and scarcely able even to breathe

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

in our closed landaus, until happily at one o'clock we reached our destination.

Here personally a great disappointment awaited me. The Armenian telegraph official had gone for a day's shooting in the mountains, leaving a message for me to the effect that he had the *reflets métalliques*, and would be back at six o'clock; but should we be intending to start earlier we were to send one of his servants on horseback to fetch him. Now six o'clock was the exact moment we had fixed upon for our departure, so while Aimé got our lunch ready, I told a servant to go and fetch his master.

After lunch we arranged our camp-beds and tried to have a siesta. But the flies were too much for us, and, tormented out of all patience by them, I finally got up and went to see if the servant had returned yet. I found him in the doorway, and was informed that he had been unable to get a horse and so deliver my message. Of course he lied, but I could do nothing—the only thing was to wait until six o'clock. We had never started punctually yet, so another delay would really be nothing unusual. Six o'clock came, and we sat down to dinner, consisting of eggs, preserved peas, biscuits, and jam. Seven passed, and still we sat and drank cup after cup of tea without a sign of the Armenian. Half-past seven struck, and Aimé commenced to collect our luggage. By this time I was distraught, and wandered up and down the passage, the stairway, and the court,

## The Return

trying all the doors, which were unfortunately padlocked. In the room, however, in which we had rested, there was one very shaky-looking door, leading one knew not where. I gave it a push, and it yielded immediately, flinging me into a little dark inner chamber. I lit a match and saw against the wall five or six different-sized *reflets métalliques*. No miser discovering a hoard of gold ever felt more excited than I did at that moment. Nevertheless it was necessary to examine the things very carefully, as clever imitations, made by skilled workmen who were thoroughly aware of the value of the originals, are by no means rare. Unfortunately I had nothing but matches to see by, and was obliged to kneel to look at them. I found one about a foot square, with an interlaced background, and the design of a bird sharply and finely drawn upon it. The colour of the background was a pale ochre, an inscription in blue letters, perfect both in construction and treatment, being stamped upon it. These were all characteristics of the very best art of the Mongol period, and I literally trembled with delight. Unfortunately in the feeble light it was impossible to get any idea of the quality of the enamel itself, or of the value of its iridescence. And the authenticity of the thing hung entirely upon these two questions. To make sure of its value I ought to have waited to see it by daylight, but I felt already that nothing would ever induce me to part with its loveliness again. There were three others of a

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

larger size, with a magnificent turquoise background, and some beautiful inscriptions. I could not identify them, but I felt very sure that they likewise were not going to be left behind me at Kashan.

Before I had done I also discovered two star-shaped plaques, one with admirable iridescence, and the other a fragment belonging to the fourteenth century. The discovery filled me with joy, but unfortunately there was still no sign of the returning telegraphist. By this time it was nine o'clock, and it had become absolutely necessary for us to leave the post-house. Consequently I wrote him a letter saying that I had taken the plaques, and would he wire me at Teheran the price he wanted for them. If we could not come to a satisfactory agreement the things should be returned to him at my own expense. Accordingly I carried my precious discoveries to the carriage, and so as to make certain of not losing them, hid them away under the mattresses. Just as I was doing so my Armenian finally arrived, and we at once went into the question of prices. The bargaining was no easy matter, but we finally agreed to the sum of 150 tomans, and all that remained was for me to pay it. Here a new difficulty arose, for it was dubious whether all of us together possessed as much. However, by collecting everything we had, we just managed to pay it, and after packing the plaques in a case which we fastened securely to the back of the landau, we

## The Return

finally, at half-past ten (four hours later than arranged), left Kashan for the next posting-station. Personally I felt that the delay had been more than compensated for, and I was so excited that long past midnight I still lay in the landau, staring at the stars and dreaming awake of my wonderful possessions.

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At the last posting-house before Kum another quarrel took place. There were eight horses, but so worn out that they refused to let us have them. Our one idea now, however, was to reach Kum, where Keller and the Mercédès were waiting for us, and from where we could get to Teheran in time to sleep in the excellent beds of the Ritz Hotel. So overwhelming was our longing to be parted from our execrated Persian carriage that, not being able to obtain them by persuasion, we seized them by means of sheer physical violence. Even then there was only one coachman available, but we got hold of a groom for the second carriage, Aimé taking the reins and driving. In this fashion we descended from the mountains into the plains, from where we could see once more, glowing above the trees, the cupola of Saint Fatmeh.

Suddenly the coachman of the first carriage stopped his horses, got off the box, and went and spoke a few words to the groom at the back. He then, in his turn, got down, and the two strode off quickly across the desert.

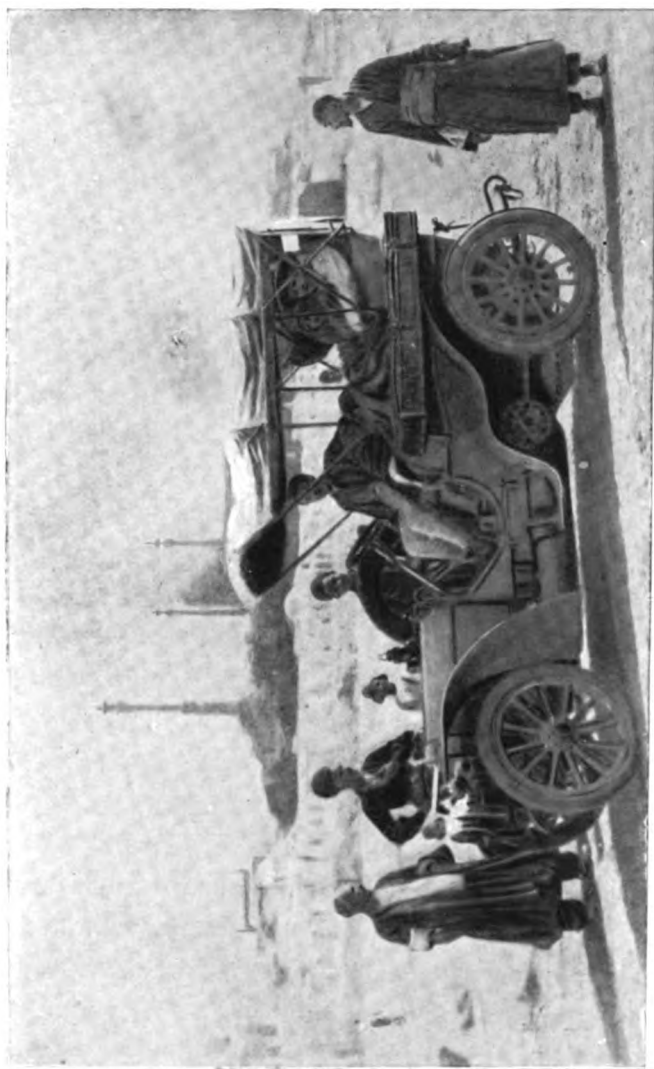
## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

What was the matter ? We dared not let them leave us, as the road to Kum was most difficult to follow, only one track, in the midst of endless irrigating canals and broken bridges, being passable. So we drove in hot pursuit after our fugitives, soon getting alongside of them. But even then the coachman absolutely refused to take up the reins again. Having exhausted every possible argument, George Bibesco hit him with his fist. Instantly the man fell on his knees in the sand, howling, grinding his teeth, and tearing his hair in a perfect frenzy of desolation. Obviously he was either drunk or mad. I took him carefully by the scruff of his neck and dragged him to the carriage, where, helped by the others, I hoisted him on to the box again. Then, seizing the whip, I alternately showed him Kum in the distance and the handle of the weapon, while I settled myself in a threatening attitude behind him. This time he understood, but implored me to give him back his whip, not that it was of the smallest use to him, but that without it the dignity of his position was gone. I did so, feeling that in an emergency I could rely upon my fists, and finally he once more started the horses. George Bibesco meanwhile had equally convinced the groom of the futility of further rebellion.

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At midday we crossed the narrow bazaar of Kum, and arrived at the charming garden of the *chapar khaneh*, where all the pomegranates had, as if in our





IN THE HEART OF PERSIA. OUR CAR BEFORE THE MOSQUE AT KUM

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## The Return

honour, burst into blossom, and where, to our joy, we found Keller and the Mercédès. It was the first motor-car that had ever entered Kum, consequently before starting, at three o'clock, we were photographed by the banks of the river, with—oh, sacrilege!—the sacred mosque in the background. We left Aimé and our luggage to catch us up twenty-four hours later at Teheran, and then started. To describe the delight of going at the rate of twenty-five miles an hour in a softly-cushioned motor, over the same road on which for a day and a night we had been shaken in the awful Persian diligence, would be quite impossible. We were running over a hard and rocky road, and the heat was intense, waves of hot air like a dry burning douche beating against our faces. George Bibesco, in the seventh heaven at being once more at the wheel, and confident of the strength of his springs, let the car go for all it was worth. We simply jumped over the rough bits, and though we felt the jars pretty badly nobody cared. At this rate we were certain to reach Teheran that night, and in five hours to get through the ninety-four miles which separated us from the capital. At Kush-i-Nusret, where we had passed our first night on the outward journey, we stopped and had some tea.

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Gradually the sky ahead was darkening. The Elburz chain was swathed in clouds—Demavend one could not see. Clearly there was a storm over

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

Teheran, especially as a burning wind was sweeping wildly against our faces and gradually beginning to stir up the sand beneath us. We could see it from a distance lifting the sail, as it were, and carrying it over the sides of the hills in long grey-coloured trails. And finally, just as we reached the top of a small incline, we were caught in and nearly smothered by a whirlwind. It was impossible to see a yard ahead of us, and the car had to be brought to a standstill. The fine dust changed to little stones and great lumps of sand, which struck against us with such violence that we were obliged to kneel at the bottom of the car, covering our faces with our hands, while nearly asphyxiated by the cutting blast. It was an agonizing sensation, and one hitherto omitted from our multifarious experiences. Being really avid of adventures, the thought of being caught in a sandstorm helped us to bear our physical distresses. Moreover, it only lasted five minutes, though our one dread when it subsided was how the motor had stood the onslaught, and whether its delicate mechanism would not be choked with dust and debris. No, it throbbed regularly, and a minute later was once more sending us swiftly towards Teheran. Night came. We climbed the sides of mountains, rushed down into the plains again, and slipped between the arid rocks, all at the same break-neck pace. The whole lot of us were shaken like water rinsed out in a bottle, but nothing stopped us. Obstacles we simply jumped over

## The Return

without pausing, and at half-past eight, in the hurricane of wind which had never really subsided, we reached the gates of Teheran. It had taken us five and a half hours to get over a distance which on the outward journey it had required twenty-five hours of ceaseless torture to cover.

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At Teheran we found the Phérékydes, who had no sooner told us their adventures than they were obliged to start off again. The rest of us, however, went before our departure to see Goulah-ek, the summer residence of the Russian Legation at Teheran, and Shimran, that of the English minister. Here, at the foot of the mountains, are delightful gardens, with running waters and green trees, where, during the hottest days of summer, the temperature is always exquisite. But by the 8th of June we were once more on the road to Resht and the Caspian, though not without having had considerable difficulty in getting sufficient petrol for the journey. It was finally sold to us at a sum amounting to about three francs the litre. We wanted to do the 220 miles in twelve hours, stopping once only for luncheon. At this rate we could have reached Resht that evening. As we had seen on our outward journey on this road, there was a dry torrent bed at every hundred yards' distance, making 3500 channel beds between Teheran and Resht. Needless to say that it was impossible to slow down 3500 times, and that consequently

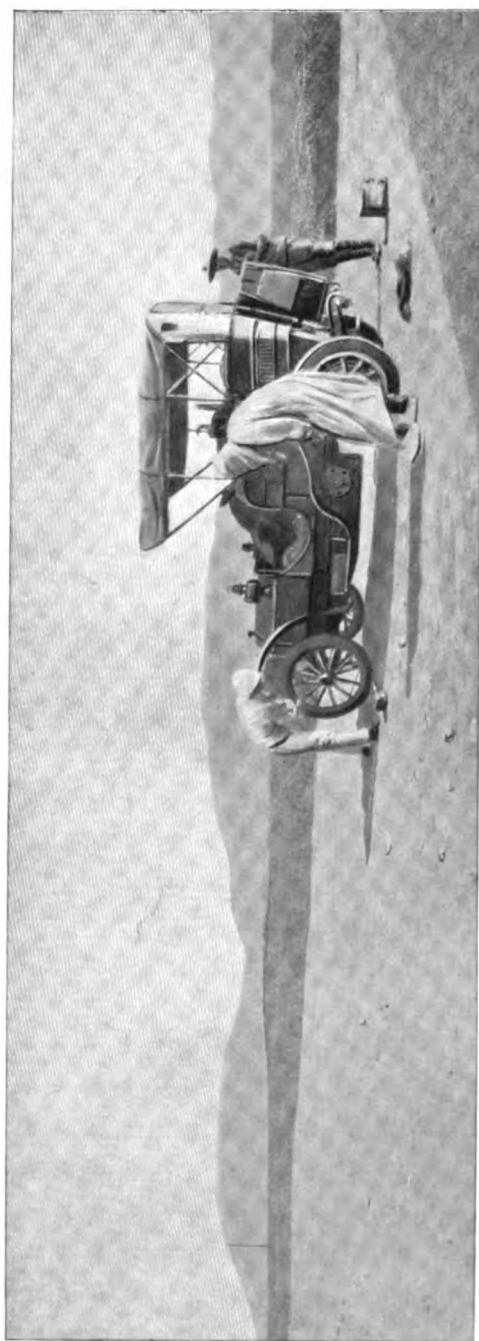
## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

we took the beds at full speed. George Bibesco relied on his springs, and the only question was whether our spirits would stand it with equal equanimity. This, however, was one of the things only to be learnt by experience.

We had not started more than three-quarters of an hour before one of the right tyres burst. Keller and George Bibesco repaired it, while the rest of us sheltered from the already burning sun under some willows by a swiftly-running rivulet. After losing twenty minutes we started off once more, but only to have another tyre burst almost immediately. This time I set to work also, but to put fresh tyres on a car in the blazing heat of Persian sunlight is no light business. However, at the end of half an hour we went on again, safely reaching the river with the broken bridge. We had a cup of tea at the neighbouring *chapar khaneh* and then crossed the foot-bridge, while George Bibesco took the car through the river, the waters of which had, however, dropped considerably since our last crossing a month previously.

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A quarter of an hour after leaving the river the left tyre burst. By this time the heat of the sun was deadly. Nobody in fact who has not gone through the experience can imagine the moral courage required to undo the necessary box of tools, and, dripping with perspiration, to fix and inflate a fresh tyre, at twelve o'clock on a June day, in the



A PUNCTURE AT MIDDAY IN THE DESERT

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## The Return

middle of the blazing Persian desert. Exhausted with the effort, we started off for the third time, praying to the god of pneumatics to have pity on us henceforward. Our prayers, however, were not regarded, for less than an hour later the same inner tube burst, also the outer tyre, and another half-hour had to be lost repairing them. Fortunately we were then in a little village, and the inhabitants collecting round us, we picked out one to help inflate the new tyre. I photographed him as he was busy at this unprecedented labour. It was then two o'clock, and we began to wonder when we should arrive at Resht, or, if our luck did not improve, whether we should have enough outer tyres and inner tubes to enable us to get there at all.

Towards three o'clock we reached the Kasvin *chapar khaneh*, where it took us an hour and a half to get a little *kebab* and a *samovar*. Then at five o'clock, just as we were starting, a sudden storm darkened the sky and swept up whirlwinds of dust about us. Blinded, we were obliged to come to a standstill in the royal avenue, in front of the governor's palace. A brief and violent shower followed; then the sun broke out as radiantly as ever, and we continued our journey first up the mountain-side and then down a difficult incline to the Caspian, a descent we had to make in the darkness of the night. Moreover the trouble with our tyres was far from being over. Just as we began to come down the hill an inner tube in the left wheel burst and lost

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

us another twenty-five minutes, while before the night was over we were obliged to put a fresh tyre and a new inner tube to one of the wheels in the front. We could not have had more ill-luck if we had tried for it.

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Though we were 4500 feet above the sea-level and the sun was gone, the heat continued to be so intense that we were obliged to drive in shirt sleeves. At ten o'clock we reached the post-house in the defile, so tired that we were scarcely able to enjoy the hospitality offered to us. All we could take was a cup of broth. From there we started upon the last stage of our journey, intending to do the fifty-six miles still remaining ahead of us in three hours. But we were soon undeceived as to our likelihood of succeeding, as at every moment we either passed or encountered a caravan. And the moment the camels saw the lights of the car they turned their backs to the enemy, wheeled round, and, forming a sort of circle, told each other their terror. Vainly I called out, "*Kabardar ! kabardar !*"—they took no notice whatsoever. Swerving from right to left across the road, all the cords that attached them one to the other became inextricably mixed, and we had to wait until they were extricated and the animals got into line again. The donkeys meanwhile showed fright after another fashion. Apparently hypnotized by the light, they refused to move, and had

## The Return

to be carried to the side of the road before they would start on again.

I think we met twenty camel caravans and as many consisting of mules and donkeys only, each encounter costing us five or ten minutes' delay. Presently we passed into the forest. Here the air was exquisitely fresh, and by the light of our lamps we could see the hundred-year-old olive trees. Later on we passed through an avenue of beech trees and maples. Hedges of bindweed also ran along the side of the road, while cascades of water leapt down various parts of the wood. The noise of their fall was like a lullaby to our weariness, for though the perpetual jolting against the stones kept us from sleep, and obliged us to hold on to the sides of the car, we were so tired that we could hardly keep our eyes open. Once we narrowly escaped running over a jackal; but all this time George Bibesco remained valiantly at the wheel.

Shortly afterwards another tyre burst, and as only one inner tube was left we bandaged the outer one as best we could. This took some time, and while it was going on the rest of us went in search of a waterfall we could hear splashing somewhere near us. Under the trees the darkness was intense, but with some difficulty we reached the stream, and, taking off our shoes and stockings, bathed our feet in the cool water. Through the leaves above our head we could see a sky literally quivering with

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

radiant stars. When we started again it was three o'clock in the morning. We had now been running for nineteen hours, and never before had we been so tired. Presently ~~the bandage~~ gave way and had to be refitted. By this time a hesitant dawn showed us the motionless trees which bordered the road. A faint mist hung above them, as if the breath of the night which was about to leave us. The sky was grey and foggy, and it was difficult to see anything. Even our driver was becoming weary, but as we had left the mountains and were on level ground, the car was running at full speed again. Inside, the Princess Bibesco, her cousin, and I, were so tired, that not a word could be dragged out of us. We seemed at last to have reached the limits of endurance, and to be on the borderland of unconsciousness. The constant bumping had induced a kind of physical numbness, extremely painful, and yet that at the same time was almost pleasant. Suddenly we were all three thrown off our seats, the car jumping several yards into the air. Should we, we wondered, find it intact on returning? Happily we fell back quite safely upon our seats again, and the car, which had violently collided with a donkey's back, continued as if nothing had happened. So exhausted were we that the incident roused no emotion whatsoever, but the jolt definitely wakened us, and we opened our eyes to look at the surrounding scenery.

We had come upon a beautiful, calm spot, whose unexpected strangeness both surprised and en-

## The Return

chanted us. Instead of a road ran a straight avenue covered with fine sand, and bordered on each side by jade-coloured water, broken here and there by a rice swamp, while the water itself was enclosed by hedges of carefully cut box. Beyond the rice patches, which pierced the shining surface of the water, were coppices and thickets, making little peaceful woods in which not a bird could be heard singing. Here and there, raised on piles, stood tiny whitewashed houses, where, on an open balcony, protected by reed blinds, the rice-field gardeners could be seen peacefully sleeping on mats.

A solemn calm brooded over the whole scene. It was like the peace which must have lain over the gardens of the Sleeping Beauty. Half asleep, we gazed upon its gentleness, hardly knowing whether we were awake or dreaming, and not daring to speak for fear a word might disperse this vision of little jade-coloured patches set in delicious foliage.

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At six o'clock we reached the consulate. We had been twenty-two hours on the road, and were too tired and dusty for any possible description. But even there rest was denied us, as we were unable to sleep for the mosquitoes. Moreover, at ten o'clock the Phérékydes, whose accidents had been so numerous they had long ceased to count them, arrived and disturbed us. As a climax to their catastrophes, a wheel of the carriage had broken, and they

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

had been obliged to do the last nineteen miles in one of the springless carts belonging to the post office.

. . . . .

That evening we took a carriage and drove to a garden the Princess Bibesco was anxious we should see before leaving. At the gates we left the carriage and strolled on foot under the shade of hundred-year-old trees, where Persians were also taking the air in couples. Seen by night, how I loved this garden, with its flowers and trees and lawns and pathways. And as we walked we presently came to an enclosure, surrounded by iron railings. Behind the railings we could see dimly a garden of lilies, with a round pavilion in the centre, whose open veranda was hung with illuminated lanterns. Finding one of the entrance gates open we entered, losing ourselves immediately among lilies, irises, and daisies, in an atmosphere heavy with the scent of blossoms. Suddenly a Persian came towards us—it was the owner of the garden. With the utmost courtesy he thanked us for entering, and had some seats brought for us, as well as tea, lemon, ices, and other refreshments. An old man who was with him also drew from his pocket a tobacco pouch, which he slowly opened and held out to us. In the semi-darkness I could not see what he was offering, and took it for tobacco, until, holding it in my hand, I discovered it was a fragrant piece of honeysuckle

## The Return

which the old man carried so carefully at the bottom of his pocket.

The impressions we carried away from Resht consisted almost wholly of the beautiful vision we had seen at dawn and this pleasant memory of the evening. On the 10th of June we passed out of Persia, travelling by boat and by train to Tiflis, where we found all the shops shut, but where, at the Hotel de Londres, we came upon our friend Léonida, who had arrived two days before us. His perilous adventures, however, deserve a chapter to themselves.

## CHAPTER X

### FROM TIFLIS TO TABRIZ AND ZINJAN, OR LEONIDA'S HEROIC ADVENTURES WITH A MERCÉDÈS IN THE PERSIAN MOUNTAINS

AS previously stated, our friend Léonida had been left behind at Tiflis, having determined to try for himself whether the road through Tabriz to the heart of Persia really was negotiable by motor. He arranged the car so that it could carry about 700 pounds of petrol, and, accompanied by an interpreter and his faithful chauffeur Giorgi, whose name equally deserves to be handed down to posterity, he took the train for Akstafa.

Originally a road ran from Akstafa to Tiflis, but when the railway was built, twenty-five years ago, the Russian Government, in order to oblige travellers to take the train, destroyed the roadway. It was from Akstafa, consequently, that Léonida's numerous and varied adventures commenced. I think, however, the best way of relating them is to copy the brief notes jotted down by Léonida himself in his diary. Nothing could convey more clearly the energy and the almost frenzied obstinacy with which he attempted to carry out his intention, or



## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

the natural difficulties he encountered—difficulties intensified further by floods, by a people in revolt, by massacres, and by roads given over to brigands. Following on a serious error made by Giorgi, appalling ill-luck besides dogged him from start to finish, though with an almost unheard-of determination he made effort after effort to join us by motor at Teheran.

I now turn to the notes in Léonida's diary.

. . . . .  
*Sunday, 7 May.* Arrived by midday at Akstafa, raining so hard, that it took an hour to negotiate the mile of mud between the station and the high-road. There I was stopped by Cossacks, with orders to let no one pass on account of brigands. However, I presented my letter from the Governor of Tiflis, and was allowed to proceed in consequence. The road at first was good, but the moment we got into the mountains we encountered our initial difficulty, in the shape of a torrent bed, three feet deep. Got over it all right, however, and reached Delijan, at the foot of the pass, by four o'clock. Here, in spite of opposition from everybody, I decided to push straight on for Erivan. The rise became so sudden that I had to go at first speed, and the motor began to get over-hot. Cooled it, however, with snow. The wind also was terrific, but notwithstanding I got without accident to Elenovska, near Lake Gotcha, a distance of fifty-

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

six miles from Erivan. From there the road was good, and before ten I was in the town, where, not being able to get the car into the hotel yard, I had to leave it in the streets, guarded by Cossacks.

*Monday, 8 May.* After the governor had telegraphed to all the officials along the route, and after having bought all the petrol I could lay hands on, I started off once more at half-past two. On leaving the town we struck for three miles an old abandoned road, with holes three feet deep and choked with mud. Then came a fairly good track with abrupt inclines and descents, along which we could make nine or ten miles an hour. It was at the end of another seven miles that I noticed that something was wrong with the car, though the motor itself was working efficiently. I examined the driving-gear from one end to the other, and at last discovered that the pinion was loose on the axle. This was a serious matter. Consequently we took off the body, detached the speed gear, and patched up the axle as best we could. That done we could just get along, though that was all. Turned round, therefore, and made for Erivan. At nine we reached a little village, but here they refused to have anything to do with us, and I had to show my official letter in order to obtain a bed at the inn.

*Tuesday, 9 May.* Rose at five and started shortly after. Found the roads even more muddy and full of holes than yesterday, and had hardly gone two miles when the car became embedded in

## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

mud up to the axles. This time, unfortunately, the axle was broken right through. Four oxen, yoked to the car, hauled it out of the hole, and after I had spent three hours looking for horses I made my way back slowly to Erivan. The road was lined by hundreds of peasants, who had seen us pass the day before and now came out to jeer at us.

Reached Erivan in the afternoon and decided to send the useless car back by train to Tiflis. There had, however, been a landslip on the railway, and owing to this I once more changed my mind, and decided to repair as best I could in Erivan, and once more to tempt fortune with a fresh endeavour. Subsequently I found a very intelligent engineer, leader of the revolutionary party in the town, who worked with me to repair the axle. At the same time I dismissed my interpreter, who when he was asked ten francs invariably told me twenty. For the future I determined to get over my difficulties alone, save for the help of Baedeker's "Book of Conversation."

*Wednesday, 10 May.* Repaired the car and changed the axles. The foot-brake was also broken, and I had to put the eleventh leaf to my springs.

*Thursday, 11 May.* Repairs continued. At ten in the morning began to put car together again.

*Friday, 12 May.* Started at eleven. The going was excellent, and at two we lunched some forty miles away from Erivan. Then pushed on to Nakhichevan, along a fairly good road with only one

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

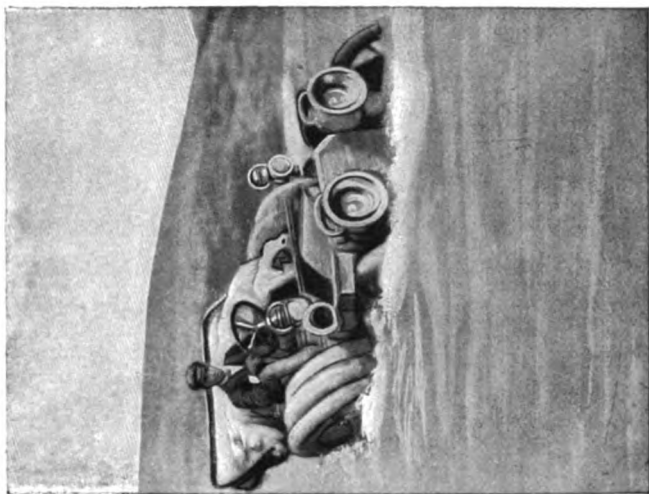
mountain to cross over. At seven we were at Nakhitchevan, which was full of soldiers. Cossacks wanted to stop my going on to Julfa on account of the brigands, but, thanks to a letter from the governor, I continued in spite of the order. First crossed the river Nakhitchevan, watched by a crowd of a couple of thousand people collected on the banks. The current was very strong and the water, which was above the axles, splashed over me. Nevertheless, the motor worked excellently, and I succeeded in getting to the other side, to the great stupefaction of the crowd. A little farther on I had four times to cross another river, the Alingiaciai. This is a detestable little river, with steep banks and great rocks in its bed hidden under the water. I got across without any damage, which, under the circumstances, was little short of miraculous. After this the track became impassable—full of rocks and holes, and solid yellow mud. I was making no headway at all, when suddenly in the dark, a few hundred yards in front of me, I saw five men barring the roadway.

They all carried guns, and I concluded that they were the brigands referred to by the Cossacks. To go back was impossible, so I tried to get up as much speed as I could and take them by surprise. Fortunately as I got near them the road grew better, and I was able to do a good twenty miles an hour. They signalled to me to stop. I drove right on to them, and as they jumped aside to avoid being run



FERRYING ACROSS THE SECOND ARM OF  
THE ARAX

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CROSSING THE NAHKITCHÉVAN

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## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

over I slipped rapidly past them. We had hardly gone a hundred yards when we heard shots and some bullets whizzed past us. But we were moving too quickly, and were soon in safety. All the same, it was sharp work.

Five miles further on we were again stuck in the mud. To get out I had to start the motor, and then Giorgi and I, both lying flat on the ground, slowly raised the axle. Just as we were getting back into the car a Tartar, sprung from I don't know where, made a dash at me. I was lucky enough to strike him full in the face with my fist, and he rolled over on to the ground. We then quickly bound him round with a rope and pitched him into the car. In this manner we took him on to Julfa, where we arrived without further accident at eleven o'clock, having taken five hours to do less than twenty miles. Here we handed our Tartar over to the commandant of the town. In spite of endless inquiries, however, I could get no information concerning the road to Tabriz.

*Saturday, 13 May.* Reached the banks of the Arax, but found that it was impossible to cross the river before nine in the morning. The Arax has two arms, and its waters at this time were swollen by the rains of an abominably wet spring. The first arm is crossed by a ferry-boat, but, owing to the flooded condition of the river, we could not reach it, and had to build a gangway of planks before we could get the car on board. This lost

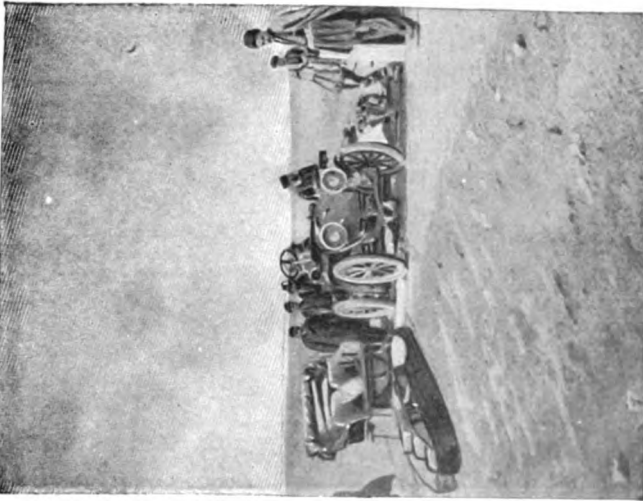
## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

us several hours. At the second arm we had to trust to a little barge about thirty feet long and four and a half in beam. The officials objected to my attempting to cross under the circumstances, but having eventually obtained their sanction, and after a thousand other difficulties, I got the car on board, and at last fairly landed on Persian soil. It had taken me seven hours to cross the two arms of the Arax. I started off again and was soon in the mountains, though here there was no longer a road, only a track too bad for words. As a result, had hardly gone three miles—and those only after super-human efforts—when the axle broke again.

Utter despair seized me. However, I secured some oxen, which dragged us back to the river. We then recrossed to Julfa, where I found all ideas of repairing impossible. I asked myself what I was to do. Cross the Arax a third time, or return to Tiflis? Rather than do that I decided to go on to Tabriz—about ninety miles off—getting some horses to haul the car, as once there I was sure of having it repaired again. Two thousand francs were asked to take us to Tabriz, but the kindly head of the customs got it reduced for me to eight hundred—a fairly stiff price even then.

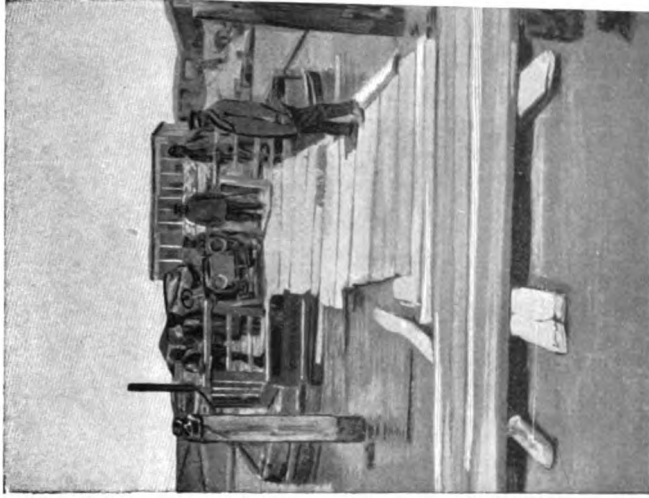
*Sunday, 14 May.* Got off at four in the afternoon and travelled all night, the four horses having the greatest difficulty in making any headway in the mountains, while the embankments that had been thrown up in the construction of the Russian road





THE BROKEN AXLE

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THE LANDING AT JULFA

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## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

accentuated our difficulties. It took twelve hours without resting to cover the first twelve miles. The damage done to the front axle, and the fact that the horses pulled now on one side and now on the other, thus exerting an unequal strain on the car, retarded all real progress. On the way met the Austrian consul coming from Tabriz by carriage. He had broken two wheels, and declared that to reach Tabriz by motor-car was impossible.

*Monday, 15 May.* Our progress horribly slow, the track being constantly crossed by irrigating canals, three feet wide and nearly two feet in depth. There was one about every half-mile, and each time we had to bridge them over with planks. At ten in the evening we reached Marand, a large Persian village. It was impossible to go on, but I was received by the governor and at last slept for a few hours.

*Tuesday, 16 May.* Took the car to pieces in the early morning, and then started by carriage to Tabriz with the broken axle. I had hardly gone six miles when the carriage wheel broke. I did not reach Tabriz till ten at night, so that we had taken fourteen hours to cover the thirty miles which separate Marand from Tabriz. Once arrived, I slept in a wretched room in the Hotel de Russie.

*Wednesday, 17 May.* Was most warmly welcomed by the European colony, and started to look out for a piece of steel for my axle. Steel appears to be a somewhat rare commodity in

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

Tabriz. However, after hunting through the bazaars and in all the old stores, I at last discovered a piece which had previously been used as a motor-axle. I then spent two days with a mechanic in turning it on a hand lathe about thirty inches long. That done, came the question of motor spirit. There was none to be had. Eventually, however, I heard that the Crown Prince, Governor of Tabriz, had procured some for a cinematograph which would not work. They offered to let me have it at cost price, so I bought sixty litres\* at ten francs the litre, a price that seemed excessive until one realized that it had been obliged to make the same journey as I had made from Erivan to Tabriz.

*Thursday, 18 May.* Started at night for Marand, taking thirteen hours to get there. It had been raining incessantly for the last two days, and the driver and I spent most of our time in pushing the cart out of the mud in which it stuck perpetually. The journey by motor-car certainly promised to be eventful.

*Friday, 19 May.* Once more fitted the parts together, having by this time begun to understand the business, and got away by noon. The streets were running with water, and we had to do the first twelve miles at first speed. Presently we reached the terrible mountain Jam, where the mud was as thick and sticky as glue. The car soon became absolutely embedded in it, and in

\* A litre = 1.76 pints,  $4\frac{1}{2}$  litres = a gallon.

## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

the struggle to get it out the axle broke for the third time. Positively I could have cried with rage and disappointment. After this we spent four hours searching for oxen. Eventually five of them and twenty men helped to get us out of the hole we had fallen into. It then took thirty-two hours, without a moment's rest, to arrive at Tabriz, which was reached at eight on Saturday evening.

*Sunday, 21 May.* Reparation of car. Had to pay five hundred francs for a new axle, while two days were required to turn it, during which I explored Tabriz, the European colony entertaining me splendidly.

*Tuesday, 23 May.* Finished the car, and the governor, having given me a letter to the officials on my route as well as the right of requisition, I took my kind hosts for a spin in the car. Never having seen one before, all the Persians we passed were terribly frightened at it. At half-past one I left Tabriz, the European colony giving me a great send-off. Shortly after we were once more in the mountains, where, as the result of landslips, big rocks had fallen all along the track. We had to work like navvies to get along at all, while on the Chiblin Mountains the gradients were as much as thirty degrees. I was going all the time at first speed, and took five hours to do twelve miles. Eventually we reached a height of 6000 feet—Tabriz being 3600 feet above the sea-level—but so bad had the road become that I was obliged to

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

secure some oxen to assist the motor. Suddenly the axle, for the fourth time, broke again.

Overpowered by fatigue and discouragement, I had the car hauled as far as a caravanserai, and from there took a horse and a Persian guide to Tabriz. We arrived at one in the morning, and never can I convey the impression of utter desolation that this dead Tabriz, seen in the night, made on me.

*Wednesday, 24 May.* Sent some oxen to fetch the car. This time I had given up all idea of going further, for it was the fourth time that I had had to repair the axle, broken in the first instance by Giorgi. I felt past doing it again, and decided to take the car to pieces and dispatch it by camels to Erivan. But for this I was asked 4000 francs. Staggered by the price, I made up my mind at any cost once more to repair the axle and to return to Tiflis by car. After unheard-of difficulty I found a piece of steel, for which I had to pay 150 francs, with another hundred to the mechanic for turning it.

*Thursday, 25 May.* The oxen arrived with the car. Also sinister news from the Russian Caucasus. A general uprising had taken place round Erivan; there were massacres in every district, and all communication between Julfa and Erivan was broken. The way back was obviously closed to me. What was to be done, therefore? To go on I decided, and make another attempt to reach

## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

Teheran, and from there to join my friends, who by now, more fortunate than I was, were probably already in the distant city of Ispahan.

*Friday, 26 May.* Tried the car with the new axle, and engaged a *ghoulam* (courier) who had been formerly coachman to the Crown Prince. He at once declared the journey impossible. However, I took him for a spin in the neighbourhood to show him what the car could do. The irrigating channels were such absolute obstacles that I had to use planks to pass over them. In crossing a river the motor fell into a hole impossible to get out of; so I had to spend the whole night on the seat, with the water streaming through the car, right up to my feet, while to make matters worse it poured with rain. Towards five in the morning a panther came down to drink not far from me.

*Saturday, 27 May.* At ten the oxen pulled us out of the hole, and I returned to Tabriz to arrange for my departure. On the advice of the *ghoulam* I bought a hatchet, a pickaxe, a shovel, and some planks twelve feet long with which to negotiate the crevices. When the Crown Prince makes this journey, it appears, he has three carriages, a number of spare wheels and springs, and a fatigue party of two thousand.

*Sunday, 28 May.* At four made an early start, taking the *ghoulam* with me. The difficulties of the track, considerably increased by the embankments thrown up in the construction of the new Russian

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

road from Tabriz to Kasvin, were beyond description. We had to bridge over the deep crevices, and so only covered about forty miles in eighteen hours—not three miles an hour.

*Monday, 29 May.* Left at eight o'clock in the morning, the track being right up in the mountains, making progress more difficult than ever. We slept the night at Mianeh in the car again, having hardly done twenty miles.

*Tuesday, 30 May.* We were now at the foot of a great mountain, and wasted the whole day in looking for oxen, so that we did not get away till the evening. With a yoke of twelve we then travelled the whole night, but even so only covered about eleven miles in the twenty-four hours.

*Wednesday, 31 May.* Had a terribly tiring day, and don't know how either Giorgi or I stood it. All we could find to eat in the villages were eggs, and we actually had to beat the people before they would give us even these. But we did forty-five miles, passing through Serchem, Ak Mazar, and finally stopping near Nikbeg.

*Thursday, 1 June.* Continued doing fourteen or fifteen hours a day under a scorching sun. We had now reached the high plateau of Iran, but there were still several mountain chains to be crossed before arriving at Sultanieh and Kasvin, where we were to pick up the Resht-Teheran road, along which the rest of the party must have passed three weeks ago. We went through Zinjan, and from there began a



## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

fresh ascent. It was only with the greatest difficulty that the car could be hauled along, and the joltings were almost unbearable. Suddenly the two back wheels slipped into a fissure, and in the effort to get them out the axle broke for the fifth time. This time there was nothing more to be done in the way of repairs. I was too worn out for despair; all sensation seemed to be dead in me. The accident, in fact, did not appear to have happened to me personally. For all I felt, it was as though some one else had been telling me about it.

Eventually we secured six oxen—and we had to use the governor's letter and some forceful persuasion to get them—and made our way back slowly and painfully to Tabriz. This occupied us a week, but as we had taken five days to do the distance in coming, the motor had only two days' advantage in a week on the oxen. One of our great difficulties was the question of provisions; the villagers had no eggs, and I had to show my revolver in order to make them give us the few things they had hidden, and for which I had to pay exorbitant sums.

*Wednesday, 7 June.* Back once more at Tabriz. The European colony welcomed me most warmly, and the various consuls assured me that considering the country I had already accomplished the impossible. I found a new axle ready for me, as I had telegraphed for one from Zinjan. My one anxiety now was to get back at any cost to Tiflis, and the question that

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

really worried me was, would the car in its present condition stand the journey ?

*Thursday, 8 June.* Left at eight in the morning, to find the same dangerous and abominable track, though the mud had gone and the weather was fine, so that we established quite a record, and reached Julfa at five without a single stoppage. Instead of staying there I decided at once to cross the Arax. The first arm offered no difficulty, but at the second, just as the car was being moved along our improvised gangway from the barge to the shore, the planks gave way with a crash, and it fell into the river. As it was impossible to get any one to help us with it that evening, we had again to spend the night in the car.

*Friday, 9 June.* Some horses and some oxen pulled us out of the river, and, after a general overhauling of the car, I started off again—but only to be faced by an absolute quagmire. Here the rain had been continuous, and we had to cross the bog by means of planks laid perpetually in front of each wheel. This took us several hours, although the actual distance was only a few miles. Later on we were again stuck in the Alingiaciai River, and once more had to requisition horses and oxen. It had taken us ten hours to do less than twenty miles, and it was nearly midnight before we reached Nakhitchevan, only to find the whole country round in revolt. The village itself was barricaded, and we had to sleep on the road in the car.

## From Tiflis to Tabriz and Zinjan

*Saturday, 10 June.* At half-past four in the morning drove through the village. Armenians and Tartars were engaged in cutting one another's throats, and I counted as many as ten wagons full of corpses. Although the inhabitants kept up a brisk fire from their terraces, they apparently had no desire to interfere with me personally, and allowed me to pass unmolested.

I had used up all the lubricating oil for my motor, and had to buy some salad oil. There was fighting in all the villages through which we passed, and once more we had to sleep in the car at a little distance from Erivan.

*Sunday, 11 June.* Found Erivan in a state of revolution, and in order to cross the town had to get the permission of the leader of the revolutionary party, who turned out to be the friendly engineer who had previously made a new axle for me. He rode by my side through the streets, where I saw Armenians throwing bombs on to Tartar houses, while the Tartars retaliated by shooting down every Armenian visible. Beyond Erivan the roads were better and quite dry, and though for the last twelve miles of the run we were without water for the motor, or any possibility of getting any, I went on all the same, and eventually reached Akstafa, where I took the train, arriving at Tiflis next day.

And on the following morning the others joined me there from Baku. *They* had been to Ispahan, and had even motored as far as Kum, the very centre of our much-desired Persia.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE LAST STAGE

FROM Tiflis we went by train to Batum, where, the carters not being on strike, we managed to get our trunks and our cases of Persian treasures taken on board "The Circassia," of the Paquet Company. Here we enjoyed a French *déjeuner* and found a French captain. A few yards away from us at Batum were the strikers, the patrolling Cossacks, the sinister faces of the loafers of all nations that throng the quays—in fact, Holy Russia with all its riots and massacres. But here on board was at last security, peace, and the relief of one's own language.

The sky was overcast, and shortly afterwards rain fell heavily, hiding the wooded mountains with which Batum is surrounded. As a matter of fact it rains at Batum on an average three hundred days in the year, the annual rainfall being 102 inches—more than three times that of France. The sea, however, was calm, and at six o'clock we weighed anchor and went by little stages along the coast of the Black Sea, travelling only by night and stopping every dawn outside some new port. For the first ten hours we slept, in beds narrow enough, it is true,

## The Last Stage

but at least in beds, waking to find ourselves in a lovely landlocked bay. Steep hills sloped to the sea. Little houses set in trees were dotted on the flanks that faced the bay. High up among the rocks stood an apparently inaccessible convent, while here and there rose white and slender minarets. Near the sea, above the custom-house, floated a red flag with a golden crescent. We were once more in Asia, in fact in front of a town whose very name calls up visions of the fabulous East—that is, Trebizond.

. . . . .

No boatman, however, would land us. Those that boarded the ship came to sell vegetables and fruit, but were forbidden to put passengers ashore. Had they done so they would have been thrown into prison on a charge preferred by the licensed boatmen. Liberty to trade in Trebizond is understood in the American fashion, and its methods rival those of Chicago. Finally the captain put his gig at our disposal, and once on land we hired carriages and a guide (a talented person in a red fez), and explored the town, which is built on three hills and down two valleys, all of which precipitously slope to the sea. The houses are small but solidly built, the streets steep but of well-laid macadam, the bridges of stone—the whole town being obviously commercial and prosperous. Its Turkish inhabitants belong undoubtedly to a sturdy race, made to conquer and dominate. All the old

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

men we saw were handsome and sharp-featured, the merchants wary-looking, the workmen and labouring classes hardy and industrious. The bazaars of Trebizond are not covered in, and we strolled through a labyrinth of little narrow streets, where busy workmen, squatting on their heels, were working at leather, wood, and every kind of precious stone. In the middle of the bazaar we crossed an old square-built house, erected in the fifteenth century by the Genoese, who then monopolized all the commerce of the East. It had enormous iron doors and thick stone walls, and the sight of this Italian Renaissance palace was somehow strangely moving, seen in the middle of an Asiatic bazaar. The charm of the past clings strongly to Trebizond. Xenophon's ten thousand rested there. It was also part of the Byzantine empire, while the Greeks built churches in it which are still standing. Then the Comneni ruled it in superb palaces—these Comneni, whose wives and daughters were renowned throughout the world for their extraordinary beauty. Subsequently came the Turks, under Mahomet II, but the fortifications and some of the walls of the Comnenian buildings are still in existence. At present little houses have been hollowed out in the ramparts, whilst trees have pushed through stones worn down by time. We visited some Byzantine churches, possessing remains of old frescoes, lintels of old doors, and a few finely sculptured pulpits. A good many of these churches have been converted

## The Last Stage

into mosques, which to our great surprise, after having taken off our shoes, we were allowed to enter. The two great mysteries of Persia—the veiled women and the forbidden mosques—were already things of the past.

During our wanderings we passed a number of cemeteries, overgrown with wild grasses and guarded as it were by ancient cypresses. These cemeteries, in the very heart of the town, were like so many beautiful and melancholy gardens. We then climbed to a Greek convent built on the top of the hill, and grouped effectively upon two terraces, with a doorway which might have been taken from one of Fra Angelico's frescoes, under which the nuns weave at old-fashioned and queer-shaped spindles. There was also a little church, and a chapel hewn out of the rock. In charge of a white-bearded priest we were taken over the convent, in every room of which a nun was at work, weaving threads of linen.

Before leaving Trebizond we had lunch out of doors at a café, where we drank mocha and ate Turkish delight, flavoured with rose and vanilla.

From there our boat went to Fatisa, a little town at the end of a gulf. We had missed touching at Kerisande, and this for a reason quaint and unexpected enough—in fact, solely because the price of eggs had been lowered in London and Paris. Informed of this by telegram, Kerisande had refused in consequence their delivery of fresh eggs, and we

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

had therefore no reason for stopping. All these little towns on the coast of Asia Minor export eggs by millions. I discovered that it took a week to collect them, ten days' voyage to take them to Marseilles, and three from Marseilles to Paris. So that the eggs sold to us in the capital as new-laid are at least three weeks old. I declared on the spot that henceforward I would keep my own chickens.

At Unie we took on board some dozen million of eggs. We did not, however, leave the ship, but, installed in our long deck-chairs, were content to view the town from a distance.

. . . . .

All our conversations at this time were filled with the unforgettable days we had just lived through, and the oppression of our approaching parting lay heavily upon the thoughts of all of us. We had suffered so many wearinesses, known so many dazed and arduous moments, shared also so many pleasures, and experienced days of such whole-hearted gaiety and humour, that it had come at last to seem impossible that we should ever separate. In the ordinary course of existence men and women meet one another only as it were ceremoniously, wearing their best clothes, and with their society manners uppermost ; no sacrifices are either made or asked for. But on a journey such as ours, where intimacy could never for a moment be discarded, where every discomfort, even to actual hunger, had to be borne



## The Last Stage

in public, where every mood of one's soul or temper could not but be noted instantly, where no mask could be maintained to hide character, friendship had no chance of owing anything to a passing fascination. And as a result we lay on deck filled with melancholy at the thought that the existence which had united us in so strange a bond would in a few days have come wholly to an end for us.

. . . . .

Our next halting-place was Samsoun, a little town insignificant enough when seen from the sea, but which on landing we found to possess shaded streets, an animated central square, a marble fountain, and a mosque set in the midst of trees. We visited a tobacco factory, where they make excellent cigarettes, and then took a carriage and drove some miles on the Amasian road. Presently the coachman, obviously frightened, pointed out with his whip a deserted-looking valley, and gave us to understand that Tartar brigands had possession of it. We had passed the stage of being scared by the information, but the coachman, being of a different mind, refused to go further, and drove us back to Samsoun again. From the ship we men then had a dip in the waters of the Black Sea.

Our last stop before Constantinople was at Ineboli, where, to all appearances, we might have been on the Lake of Lucerne. Rugged hills slope to the sea, while the houses are like little chalets,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

with wooden balconies, open verandas, and roofs jutting well over the side of the walls. Here a passenger gave us a bundle of newspapers. It was a long time since we had seen such things, but, having read five or six, we came to the conclusion that we never wanted to read another.

The "Circassie" all this time continued to hug the coast. The country in this part would be extraordinarily fertile, if properly cultivated. But there are no roads, and, save in the towns, life is not safe. Even so, however, it produces eggs, cattle, barley, tobacco, and nuts in abundance.

Gradually we drew near the Bosphorus. The charm of our idle life on board had penetrated all of us, and truly it seemed as if we no sooner formed a pleasant habit than it was doomed to be broken. On the 19th of June we entered the narrow straits of the Bosphorus, with its indented shores, its imperial residences, its pine woods, and its sky filled with luminous mists, as after a picture by Delacroix. Revived memories commenced to quicken in our minds, as in the middle of a silvery vapour we caught sight of the mosques, towers, and houses of the loveliest city in the world. Our journey was finally and definitely over—we had arrived at the landing-stage of Constantinople.

## APPENDIX

### HOW TO GO TO ISPAHAN BY MOTOR-CAR

HAVING been asked by several people how a motor-car expedition to Ispahan can best be managed, I give the following particulars for those who may care to adventure on such journey.

*The Selection of a Car.* Nothing less than a 30 h.p. would be of any use. A more powerful car would be inadvisable, as it would be impossible to utilize its speed. The car should have a movable hood, as the sun is at times unbearable; and a short *chassis* is preferable to a long one. Not more than three persons should be taken in a car which seats five, for camp-beds, trunks, and provisions have to be carried, while it is occasionally necessary to sleep in the car. Again, in addition to a good supply of reserve tyres, it is advisable to take a packet of outer covers and inner tubes, both of which can be sent quite quickly by post in Persia.

Good head-lamps are an absolute necessity, for more than once one may have to travel by night along an unknown and difficult road, or find one's way along the uneven tracks in the desert. At Teheran four strong planks, about sixteen feet long,

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should be ordered ; these can be fixed on each side of the car, and will be found useful after leaving Kum, both in crossing the irrigation canals and in negotiating the sand round Kashan.

*Luggage.* Ordinary trunks can be sent by train or post as far as Teheran. One portmanteau to each person, containing a complete change of outfit, can be taken in the car. An india-rubber folding bath will also be found convenient, as water can be got everywhere.

Towards the end of May the days are likely to be very hot, whilst the nights in the mountains are extremely cold ; consequently travellers should be provided with thick coats, cloaks, and rugs, as well as with pith helmets. These can all be bought at the French stores in Teheran.

A folding bed is indispensable. Nowhere in Persia are beds provided, except in a very few *chapar khanehs*, and then one's own are preferable. Light and handy camp-beds can be purchased at Tiflis, but they are terribly hard, and if there is room in the car and comfort is appreciated, it is better to provide oneself in addition with a small mattress which can be rolled up with the rugs. This, to my mind, is preferable to an india-rubber one, which has to be inflated.

Then comes the question of provisions, and the traveller in making his preparations must thoroughly realize that he can rely on getting absolutely nothing except eggs at the various posting-stations. A

## How to go to Ispahan by Motor-Car

luncheon basket is an absolute necessity, with plenty of preserved meat, and especially vegetables, as well as biscuits, jams, lemons, tea, sugar, all of which can be bought at Tiflis. I may mention in warning that we found sardines in oil, with the thermometer at 106° F. in the desert, really disgusting as an article of food.

I must also lay some stress on the importance of having the very best and largest of spirit lamps, as well as one with a well-protected flame, as more often than not the lamp has to be lit in the open air, when the least wind blows the flame about and prevents the water from getting hot.

As regards beverages, we personally drank weak tea flavoured with lemon, and found it suited us admirably. But all drinking water should be boiled, while, when the thermometer is high, hot drinks, at any rate according to our experience, quench the thirst better than cold ones.

A tiny medicine-chest should be taken, and an abundant supply of insect powder.

*The Time of Year.* There are only two periods of the year possible, one between the 15th of April and the 15th of June, the other from the beginning of September to the end of October. Winter is extremely severe on the high plateau of Iran, the spring rains are appalling, and the heat during the summer months is unbearable.

By motor-car Persia can only be approached through the Caucasus, and our adventures show how

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useless, owing to the snow, it is to think of attempting to get over the high Caucasian passes in April. If, however, one wants to see something of both countries, the cars should be sent on by train to Baku via Batum, when the month of May should be spent in Persia, and the Caucasus taken on the homeward journey.

The Messageries Maritimes and the Paquet companies have each a bi-monthly service to Batum, so that every week a boat leaves Marseilles for that part. It takes a fortnight to get there, and the boat stops one day at Constantinople, besides putting into several ports in the Black Sea—making altogether a charming voyage.

It goes without saying that to land at Batum one must have a properly *viséd* passport. One must also be provided with a permit for the motor-cars, which can be obtained beforehand through the French embassy at St. Petersburg. We had not only no difficulty in getting it, but had nowhere any custom dues to pay for our motor-cars.

Throughout the Caucasus, petrol, though of a rather high density, is obtainable, and getting the car on board at Marseilles and landing it at Batum offers no difficulties.

If it is springtime, and one is going direct to Baku, the car may be sent on by passenger train—a matter of three or four days—whilst the traveller stops at Tiflis, which is on the way.

At Baku the boats of the *Caucase et Mercure*

## How to go to Ispahan by Motor-Car

Company take the mails to Enzeli ; but as I said before, these steamers cannot cross the bar at that port, so in order to avoid a difficult landing one should apply to the Nadiejda Company, at Baku, who have small flat-bottomed steamers which can run alongside the quay at Enzeli. The mail-boats leave Baku on Sundays and Thursdays ; the others have no regular days, but leave at least once a week. It is advisable to ascertain from the Nadiejda agent at Tiflis the times of departure, and so avoid spending several more or less uncomfortable days in Baku.

At Baku, however, the traveller should provide himself with petrol. He will need four cases, each containing about 60 cans, which represents about 2650 pounds of spirit. The cases must be strong and well made, and should be sent with the car to Enzeli.

At Resht the post office, which also undertakes the carriage of goods, will dispatch three of the cases to Teheran, one being left behind for immediate use. But it is advisable previously to obtain permission for their transit from the postmaster-general at Teheran. This can be done through one's national representative at the capital. It is absolutely indispensable that the petrol should travel by post and not by caravan, as in the latter case one would have to wait so long for it at Teheran, whereas the post only takes some fifty hours from Resht to Teheran.

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As regards money for the journey, a letter of credit is by far the best method of procedure. I had one from the Comptoir National d'Escompte, by means of which I could draw money in every important town we passed through, and even in Ispahan itself. The rest of the party had a good deal of trouble, as theirs could only be utilized in one or two towns, whilst mine was everywhere accredited.

In Persia there are banknotes of 1, 2, 5, 20, and 100 tomans, issued by "The Imperial Bank of Persia," but one must besides have some change in the shape of a few krans—heavy and inconvenient coins which can be carried in sacks.

An interpreter, who will also act as a servant, is indispensable. In case of absolute necessity a traveller who does not speak Persian can get through without one at Resht, where the customs officials are Belgians, and on the Russian road from Resht to Teheran, but to go to Ispahan without one is impossible.

The traveller's representative at Teheran will take all the necessary steps to procure one for him. An interpreter, who can be engaged at Tiflis, will also be required for the Caucasus.

As I said before, it is a matter of 212 miles from Resht to Teheran, which, if one does not have too many punctures, can be done in one day. But a very early start must be made, for the road has many abrupt turns, is intersected with torrent beds, and in addition rises to about 5000 feet. Conse-



## How to go to Ispahan by Motor-Car

quently one may consider oneself lucky if one can average a speed of 16 to 18 miles an hour. Lunch may be taken at the *chapar khaneh* at Kasvin, which is 94 miles from Teheran.

At Teheran Emmanuel Bibesco and myself put up at the English hotel, where, in spite of the fact that they warmed our bath-water in the samovar, we were very comfortable. In my opinion a week allows quite enough time in which to see both the capital and the neighbourhood.

As soon as one reaches Teheran two cases of petrol should be dispatched along the Ispahan route—one, with the permission of the English minister, to the chief of the Indian telegraph at Kashan, the other to the English or Russian Consul at Ispahan. The post is a weekly one, and takes about four days.

The following are the principal stopping-places on the way :—Kum, 94 miles from Teheran, though the distance can be covered, as I have shown, in five and a half hours. The road through the bazaar at Kum, however, is narrow, and has several sharp turnings. A car with a long *chassis* might easily be involved in difficulties here. Again, for some miles past the town the track is deplorable, on account of the dilapidated state of the irrigation canals. Sometimes they have overflowed and one has to go through a shallow lake ; in other places the little bridges which cross them have simply crumbled away with age, and in these cases planks,

## Through Persia in a Motor-Car

with which one can provide oneself at Teheran, should be brought into requisition.

The distance from Kum to Kashan is just over 60 miles, and runs nearly all the way in the mountains. There is, properly speaking, no road, but a kind of rough track, which, though it shakes one pretty considerably, offers no serious difficulties. If one is in the condition to stand a long run, I advise the traveller to make an early start from Teheran, so as to be at Kum before noon, stay there for a couple of hours in the delightful garden of the *chapar khaneh*, then leave for Kashan, which with luck should be reached by six or eight o'clock in the evening. At Kashan one may, with the permission of the English Ambassador, sleep at the Indian telegraph house. Here, too, the traveller will pick up his petrol dispatched the previous week.

One must get away early the next morning, for the stopping-places are few and far between, and there is no town between Kashan and Ispahan. The first fifteen miles is through a sandy desert, and if the sand becomes too thick the planks will have to be used, but a powerful car should get through everything. During this day's run it is a very difficult matter to find a shelter of any sort, so I advise the traveller to push on as much as he can, making only four stops in the plain before reaching Natanz, where the track runs into the mountains, and where he will have to drive with more than ordinary care. If, however, he is fagged

## How to go to Ispahan by Motor-Car

out, there is a post-house at Imanzadeh-Sultan Ibrahim, in the middle of the mountains, with a barn at one's disposal. But if the traveller is not too tired, and time permits, Murchakar, or perhaps Ispahan itself, could be reached. It will be a very hard day's run, but if one starts at five o'clock at the latest, and is fairly lucky in the matter of punctures, it is quite possible, in spite of sand and mountains, to cover the 138 miles between Kashan and Ispahan before nightfall. One's host in the latter city will naturally have been warned by telegraph of one's departure from Kashan. For in Ispahan no hotel or shelter of any kind will be found, and one will have to have recourse to the hospitality of the English or Russian Consul. The traveller will be met at the gates of the town by an escort of Cossacks or Bengal Lancers, who will guide him through the labyrinth of little streets and bazaars, and protect him against the amazed and excessive curiosity of the inhabitants. It is impossible to go beyond Ispahan in a motor-car—at least, as far as we could gather. The roads are very difficult even for carriages, and certainly those that I saw a few miles to the east of Ispahan were out of the question.

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